俺の彼女と幼なじみが修羅場すぎる 2

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俺の彼女と幼なじみが修羅場すぎる

「だからさ、スズ？　代わりに――」
と、少女は俺に視線を向けた。
近づいてくる。
ベンチに座っていた俺は、腰を浮かせて逃げようとして――少女と胸と胸がぶつかった。
よろめいたところに、少女の顔が近づいて、
「スズの彼氏、アタシにちょーだい？」
くちびるを塞がれた。

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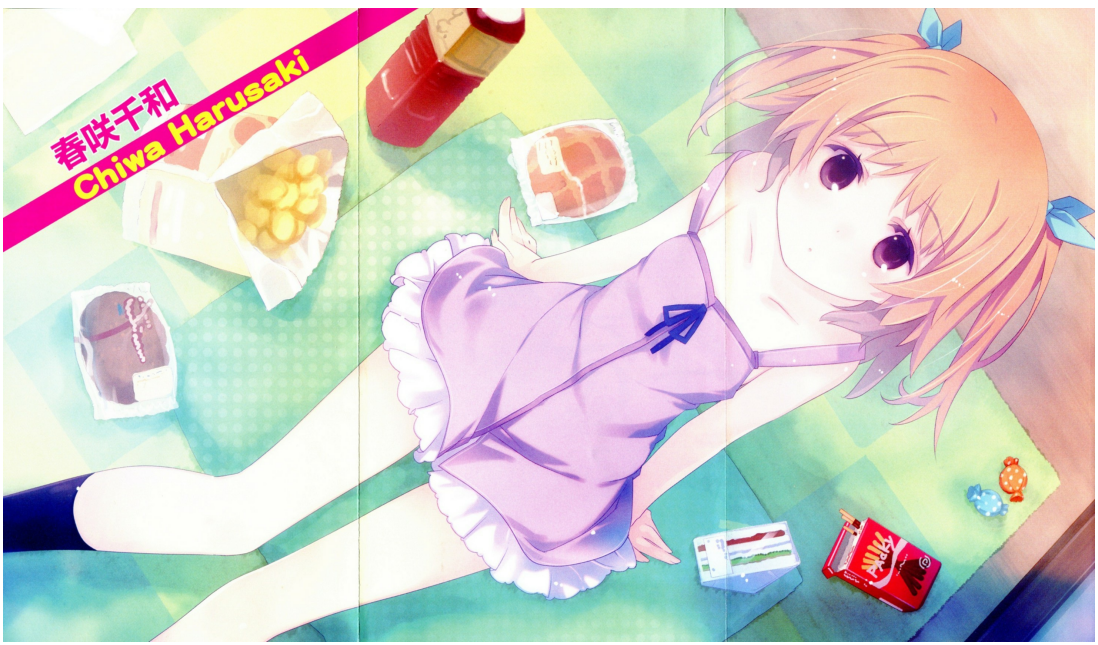

春咲千和
Chiwa Harusaki

夏川真涼
Masuzu Natsukawa

#0: This is Obviously My House... in Mayhem

#0 ここは俺の家なのに修羅場

板ばさみ　ああ板ばさみ　板ばさみ
――鋭太、魂の俳句

【彼女】か‐の‐じょ〔‐ヂヨ〕
愛人、恋人である女性。「一ができた」⇔彼／彼氏。
（デジタル大辞泉より）

【幼馴染み】おさな‐なじみ〔をさな‐〕
子供のころに親しくしていたこと。また、その人。
（デジタル大辞泉より）

There’s nothing strange about having a childhood friend.

Isn't that right? The average person in kindergarten or elementary school will have at least one or two close friends. 'Because we lived very close to each other' or 'our families have a good relationship'. Due to those innocent reasons, it didn’t matter how many childhood friends one had.

But if we talk about 'childhood friends at this age', the situation is very different.

If the other person is a girl, that's even more so.

Because puberty changes the way people interact with each other, there’s no way they could keep the same relationship from before. They remember 'their past selves' and find it embarrassing, so it becomes a barrier that gradually pushes them apart. By the time they’ve finally forgotten about that person, the sight of her walking down the street hand in hand with another guy - 'Ah, she has a boyfriend now' - is a really unpleasant feeling.

However, it’s okay.

One must step over the joys and sorrows of life in order to become responsible man.

To become an adult.

Even so.

Yes, even so—

"Unnnyyyyaaaaaaaaa! Pervert!"

It was almost time for final exams - early in July.

I was about to go wash my face when I opened bathroom's door just to be greeted by a shrieking scream.

The person who screamed was Harusaki Chiwa.

She was a first-year in high school, 15 years old.

She is my childhood friend.

Then— *Why is she naked right now?!*

Her eyes were wide opened with her soaked hair equally shocked and stiff.

Chiwa's figure was very delicate and her hands and feet were especially slender. Her buttocks looked silky and tender, and her skin was of a glossy peach color. Unfortunately, the towel barely covered her important parts… No, wait, it was fortunate misfortune.

"W-W-W-W-W—Why are you here?!"

I also let out an alarming cry no softer than hers.

After all, this happens to be my house.

Without any parents I lived here with my aunt Saeko-san. Today Saeko-san would not return home due to being busy with work, thus the only one left in the house was me.

Chiwa bent down, her face blushing red.

"I sent you a text message last night, didn't I?! The water heater in my house is broken, so I wanted to come over and take a shower in the morning!"

"...Huh? You did?"

Come to think of it, I didn't check any of my mails.

I had been immersed studying for the exams the entire time, so I completely forgot.

"Hey, how long are you going to stare?! Ei-kun, you stupid idiot! Pervert!"

"S-Sorry!"

I turned right and left the bathroom, and shut the door while facing away.

Through the door, I heard Chiwa's sharp voice.

"Even if we are childhood friends, there are things you can see and things you can't!"

"That's why I'm sorry. I didn't know."

I leaned against the door and apologized awkwardly.

The sound of clothes rustling came through the door… Chiwa probably started changing clothes, right? I thought I shouldn't be listening, so I got away from the door.

"Really? You really feel sorry?"

"Yeah, I forget to check my messages, so it's completely my fault."

"...Then—"

I felt Chiwa lean close to the door as she spoke:

"As amends, can you listen to one request?"

Here it was.

A reconciliation request.

Always after a fight, Chiwa would call out this specialty.

"What's the request?"

"Ah, it's no big deal..."

Chiwa spoke shyly:

"Will you walk with me to school more often?"

“Eh?”, I said with my head tilted, puzzled.

"Just this?"

'Cook hamburger for dinner!', I thought she'd make some kind of meat-related request.

"...It's that Ei-kun always just quickly walks to school by himself."

Chiwa muttered softly, and I didn’t know why she sounded so downcast.

Chiwa’s house was just next door. Back in elementary school, we always went to school together in the morning. But ever since middle school, Chiwa had joined the kendo club and she left home at a different time than I did. So the habit slowly disappeared.

Since Chiwa stopped practicing kendo in high school, it was now possible to go to school together…

"But, why bring this up?"

"B-Because it's natural, right? We live next door and we go to the same high school!"

"I see."

I didn't think that high school boys and girls going to school together was that natural, though.

"W-Well, then... Ah, we can also talk about club activities while we are at it!"

"Club activities..."

Since the month before, Chiwa and I had started participating in the same club.

It was called: 'Society for Bringing Out Your Maiden Self', also known as 'Jien-Otsu'.

The club's purpose was to improve the quality of one’s inner self and become the ideal young maiden – it sounded really good, but its true identity was a club that

'researched ways to become popular', that kind of unhealthy group.

I, as the only male member, was forced to shoulder the responsibility of taking care of these girls.

"I understand."

I sighed.

"When leaving the house, I'll give you a call."

"Really?"

'Yeah♪', I sensed Chiwa making a small jump behind the door. This girl was always like an eternal child.

"Starting today? Then I'll change immediately. Wait for me, Ei-kun!"

"Okay, okay."

When I was about to leave the scene, I heard a tiny sound from Chiwa.

"I absolutely will not hand you over to Natsukawa."

"Eh? What did you say, Chiwa?"

"Nothing! Nothing at all!"

I thought I heard something about Natsukawa...

Never mind, I'm probably imagining things.

Since I wasn't able to wash my face, I decided to prepare breakfast and headed towards the living room.

Without any parents and since my aunt Saeko-san was always busy with work, I did all the cooking, laundry, cleaning, and household related chores. Today was a 'not burnable trash' day, so I it was about time to take the garbage outside.

While I was thinking about this, I opened the door——

"Kya! Pervert!"

A very unconvincing fake scream greeted me.

The person who screamed was Natsukawa Masuzu.

She was a first-year in high school, 15 years old.

Masuzu had silver hair and blue eyes, since she was a Northern European descent.

Her outfit with a white frilly apron on top of her school uniform was a very 'maniac' way to dress [1]… What was this girl trying to do?

"What are you doing? Masuzu?"

"Just as it seems, Eita-kun has forced me into this vulgar cosplay. Kya— Pervert—"

"Don’t say such horrible things about someone!"

When did I ever ask anyone to wear this kind of outfit?!

I didn’t even like apron on uniforms ![2] I am not that much of a pervert!

It doesn’t matter that one was used to seeing the uniform, the combination with the neat apron makes it burst out with a newfound brilliance! Or something like that! The length of the apron annoyingly and just barely covers her skirt, so it looks like she really was giving this 'not wearing any' feeling. Or something like that. Every time the ruffles of the apron shook, I feel like my heart is jumping out of my chest! Of course I'm absolutely not thinking of anything on those lines——!

"That being said, why are you here?"

"Ara, is it a strange for a girlfriend to be in her boyfriend's house?"

Yes, the school’s number one beauty. The extent of bad character was also the school’s number one for this girl. Natsukawa Masuzu was, unexpectedly, my 'girlfriend'… Well, there was a meaningful reason for that.

"Wearing an apron for her boyfriend, and borrowing the kitchen to make breakfast… Isn’t this the role model for the 'Society for Bringing Out Your Maiden Self?'"

I sat down on the sofa and heaved a big sigh.

"In other words, this is a club activity?"

Natsukawa Masuzu was the founder of the 'Society for Bringing Out Your Maiden Self' and served as the club's president.

This girl was the root and queen of all evil.

"Last night you should have received a mail about it, saying that I would intrude here tomorrow morning. We exchanged mail addresses after all, didn't you happen to see it?"

"Sorry, I was busy studying... And by the way, how did you get in?"

"The front entrance, of course. I thought you even unlocked it for me."

"...Ah."

Right, it was Chiwa.

Because she used to always come back and forth between our houses, she has our backup key.

I too had a key for her house.

Really, when you open a door you should lock it afterwards!

"I rang the door bell a few times, but it seemed that Eita-kun was in the shower, so you didn't hear? It doesn't look like your family is around either… Even though I thought it wasn't very mannerly, I came in by myself."

"I see."

When I was clarifying and going through the facts, I noticed another important thing.

Masuzu said, "You were in the shower, so you didn't hear?"

But I was actually in bed, and since I was asleep I didn't notice…

The person showering was Chiwa.

In a few moments, she'll walk into the living room while wiping her soaking wet hair with a towel.

W•i•t•h • h•e•r • c•h•e•e•k•s • f•l•u•s•h•e•d • r•i•g•h•t • a•f•t•e•r • t•h•e • b•a•t•h, C•h•i•w•a • w•i•l•l • m•e•e•t • M•a•s•u•z•u!

"M-M-M-Masuzu!"

"Yes?"

"Please leave!"

"Eh?"

Masuzu's eyebrows frowned.

"Because I have things to do before I go to school! If you stay with me, I'll be late!"

"If that's the case, at least eat breakfast with me."

"I just ate a few moments ago! In the morning I eat three huge bowls of rice! I'm so full, I can't take even another grain of rice or a bread crumb in my stomach!"

"...I see."

Masuzu's shoulder dropped, hanging.

"I was really looking forward to eating breakfast with Eita-kun ever since last night."

Masuzu seemed lonely as she muttered to herself and the sorrowful look on her face continuously stabbed at me.

"Sorry, Masuzu, for making you come out here to specifically make breakfast."

"I always wanted you to try my extra hot curry pre-packaged meal filled with love…"

"T-That's a lot of work, right? You have to boil the water, and cook the rice."

"No, rice is also ready-made."

"For my sake, you are going to merely press a button on the microwave?!"

I didn't even know what I was saying at this point.

Masuzu gave a big sigh.

"If it is like that, there is no other way…"

"I see you are quite understanding, Masuzu."

"As expected, instead of an apron uniform, you seem to prefer me to wear a naked apron."

"I see you don't understand, Masuzu!"

"'Kidou Eita, naked apron, is crazy about' : retrieved aprox. 83,020 results (0.14 sec.)."

"What's with that Guugle[3]?! Just how much of a pervert you want to make of your boyfriend?!"

"Eeh? Well that's, eerm..."

Masuzu turned her head and became silent:

"No, I would never think like that."

"Then why did you just seem so indecisive?!"

What should I do?

This early in the morning, I had already shot through a rapid succession of over a 100 tsukkomi.

This seemed to be very bad for one's health…

"Anyways, I'm leaving."

Masuzu took off her apron, shaking her head gently.

Her silvery hair floated in front of the living room window, right in the light of the morning sun, inadvertently blinding me.

This girl was so alluringly pretty, like a fairy…

Masuzu undid the ribbon of her uniform, and spoke with melancholic eyes:

"You know, Eita-kun, I feel that a naked apron is really overdoing it too much."

"Isn't it? I feel exactly the same!"

"I'll take off my skirt, please at least let me get away with only this much today."

"That's no good either!"

"Check this out, Nii-chan, she'll take it off, take it off[4]!"

"Already settled on that act, aren't you?!"

Just as Masuzu placed her fingers on her skirt fastener——

"Hey, Ei-kun, where's the hairdryer?"

The sound came from the changing room and it made me jump suddenly. 'Waaaaah!'

Masuzu tilted her head and said:

"Eita-kun, just then, whose voice was that?"

"I-I-I-I-It was nothing!"

"Is your family home? But the voice seemed somewhat familiar."

"You're over-thinking that! That's my aunt Saeko-san! She must have just woken up!"

"Well, it's a rare opportunity, so I might as well introduce myself."

"No! Don't do strange things!"

I grabbed the hairdryer on the table and said:

"Listen, Masuzu, no matter what happens, don't move! Even if a new Stand-user appears, just don't move!"

"I don't understand exactly what you're..."

Before Masuzu could finish speaking, I ran out of the living room.

I knocked on the bathroom door and when it opened, I saw the freshly-changed Chiwa grimacing in the washroom mirror.

"Take the hairdryer, Chiwa..."

"What's with you? You're covered in sweat."

Chiwa's expression seemed surprised as she took the hairdryer.

"Don't worry, just a new Stand-user appeared."

"...? Ei-kun is weird."

Chiwa tilted her head and began using the hairdryer.

"Hey, if I occasionally change my hair style, what would you think?"

"Well, what gives?"

"Is a ponytail to your liking? Or would you rather prefer a sauvage style?"

What should I do?

Before Chiwa finds I out, I need to figure out how to make Masuzu leave.

Well, if I did it the other way around, that'd be fine… but I promised to go to school with Chiwa.

I'd like to keep my promises with my childhood friend as much as possible.

"What's with that 'what gives' stuff? ... Are you not listening?"

Chiwa pouted, and stared at me with piercing eyes.

"O-O-Of course! Hairstyle, right? Ah, but I think the way Chiwa looks right now is the best. It suits you!"

"...Really?"

"Really, really!"

When I said this, Chiwa's entire face blushed red.

She secretly patted me on the back several times.

"I hate you! Idiot, idiot♪, Ei-kun, you idiot♪."

"...?"

What was wrong with this girl? Is she confused? My back hurts.

At this time...!

"Eita-kun, which button should I push to warm the rice?"

I reacted to the sound coming from the living room: 'AOHHHHHHH[5]!'

"That's strange? Who is there?"

Chiwa turned off her hairdryer and tilted her head, puzzled.

"Aah, Saeko-san just came back."

"But I felt like the voice wasn't the same."

"S-She said she caught a little cold! A very terrible summer cold!"

"Now that I think about it, I haven't seen her in a long time. I'll go say hello."

"No! Don't think about such strange things!"

I grabbed the shoulders of Chiwa, who was about to open the door, to stop her.

"S-She seemed to be tired from work! I want to let her rest quietly, so can you wait here for a while? Okay?"

'Okay', Chiwa nodded in agreement. She knew Saeko-san was really busy, so she didn't seem suspicious.

"Then, I should also try to use the hairdryer quietly, right?"

"Please! The future of humanity depends on you!"

I almost tripped three times in the few meters the corridor was, on the way back to the living room.

"What's wrong, Eita-kun? You're covered in sweat."

Masuzu wrinkled her brow as she stood in front of the microwave.

"It was just, about the future of the, human race— yeah— hey—"

"Oh, you really are showing off your talents."

I took the rice out of the hands of the dazed Masuzu and began to work the microwave.

As I started the turntable spin, I wondered a little.

I absolutely could not let Masuzu and Chiwa meet, so I needed to cleverly lead Masuzu out of the house. But Masuzu had a sharp intuition, so I had to be extremely careful.

"Hey, Masuzu, I'm really sorry, but when you leave, can you exit from the corridor? I'll bring your shoes over.

From the living room hallway, it was possible to reach the courtyard. As long as one passed the courtyard, one could reach the road on the opposite side of the main entrance.

"Oh, what's wrong?"

"If Saeko-san knew that I brought a female student home, it would worry her, because she is a very conservative person."

This, of course, was a lie.

Saeko-san worked at a gal-game company, and loved talking about romantic topics. If she knew about this, she would say: 'Well done, Eita! Let's eat some sekihan[6] tonight.'

"I understand. Since that's the case, I'll leave right away."

Masuzu easily accepted it.

I thought she would question me, so I felt quite pathetic.

"Why do you look so startled? I don't want to cause trouble to your family. If they're home or not home, I won't recklessly come anymore."

Masuzu's expression suddenly looked very serious.

"What about Eita-kun's father and mother[7]"?

"Haven't I mentioned before? The two of them aren't with me. If we are to speak about family, there is only my aunt Saeko-san who is my guardian ———and there is also

Chiwa."

"...I see."

ding, the microwave rang.

"What's left of your family, you should really cherish it."

I took Masuzu's shoes from the entrance hall and brought them to the corridor.

Masuzu retied the ribbon she had previously undone, neatly folded her apron, and put it into her bag.

"Won't you eat the curry?"

"If we took long enough, your aunt might come downstairs, right? I'll go buy bread or something on the road at the convenience store. Might as well leave it there for your aunt[8]"

"...Sorry, Masuzu."

I felt quite sorry.

If you really thought about it, this all happened because I never checked my messages.

"I'll make it up to you another day."

"Don't."

Masuzu shook her head.

"If you are saying that much, it would be better for something to be done now."

Masuzu came from behind, hugged me and gently leaned against my body.

She was just like a beautiful French doll as her face drew close to mine and her sweet breath brushed my nose.

"Kiss me."

"Eh?"

"I kissed you before, right? So now it’s Eita-kun’s turn."

"W-W-W-W-Wh-Wh-What are you saying?! I can’t do that such a thing!"

"Even though we are already lovers?"

Masuzu with her blushing face, pressed her body close to mine.

I could clearly tell that under the ribbon of her uniform, there was a soft thing changing shape. Even if I wanted to pull my body away, the thing that stuck out would follow me!

She was absolutely doing it on purpose!

"Stop kidding around! You might speak of lovers, I'm only a 'boyfriend'!"

"Yes, that's exactly right."

Masuzu’s moist eyes looked up at me and nodded at the same time.

"Our boyfriend/girlfriend relationship is fake after all. As the 'anti-romance' I am, our relationship is really a pretense to get rid of the students who kept pursuing me —— but, Eita-kun."

Masuzu’s lips suddenly drew close to me.

I unconsciously closed my eyes —but her lips went past my lips and approached my ear:

"I know that the person in the shower is Harusaki-san."

"What?!"

"Because her shoes are at the entrance, so I knew everything from the very beginning♪."

"[...]"

I felt all my strength escape from my body.

So the point was, all this hard effort was just in vain?

"N-No, the reason why Chiwa is using this house's shower, it’s not what you think. She came over because the water heater at house is broken, that's how it is."

"Please do not misunderstand."

Masuzu interrupted my explanation:

"Is not like I’m feeling any jealousy at all. However —if there are rumors that Eita-kun and Harusaki-san are getting too close, our contract would just become scrap paper. That would be very troublesome for me."

"You don’t need to worry about that!"

Cold sweat dripped down my face.

"Didn't I said it just now? Chiwa is like family, because she’s my childhood friend, I would never see her as a member of the opposite sex. And the feeling is mutual."

"Hooo?"

Masuzu’s eyes clearly did not believe it.

"If Harusaki-san feels like that, then it would be fine."

"...What do you mean?"

"In short—"

Masuzu suddenly pulled her body away.

"Your 'Chuuni[9]. note' is in my hands, so please do not forget about that."

"Yes, I know."

The Chuuni note.

I wrote it when I was in middle school, and it’s a diary full of delusional disgraces and past events.

Because Masuzu had this in her hands, I was unwillingly forced to play the role of her boyfriend.

"Even though you are 'anti-romance', what's with that casual 'kissing' talk?"

"Ara, you're saying it backwards, right?"

Masuzu sternly spoke while putting on her shoes in the hallway:

"Precisely because I am 'anti-romance', I can talk about 'kissing' all the same. Kissing is just touching one's mouth with another, right? Only 'love-minded' and 'love-worshipping' people would think a kiss is a very precious or embarrassing thing."

"...Really?"

You really can talk. Your face was red just now, too.

"Well Eita-kun, see you at school."

Masuzu elegantly and politely bowed to me, exited through the courtyard and went out onto the road.

"Yareyare..."

I suddenly felt tired.

I realized that the day had just begun, and I really wanted to go back to sleep.

Forget it. That's impossible. The end of the semester is almost here, and I haven't taken out the 'not combustible garbage' yet.

"Unya— Ei-kun— Can I come out now?"

Chiwa must have gotten impatient and her voice came from the bathroom.

Seriously, enough...

Several reasons have made my daily life such as desperate mayhem.

♦

—Having said that, nonetheless, something in my heart was full of optimism.

The real 'mayhem' had yet to appear.

Chiwa was just like a little sister.

Masuzu was a fake girlfriend.

Even though the eyes of the people at school might have seen it as a desperate mayhem between my girlfriend and childhood friend – but this wasn't actually mayhem. These two actually are those of 'hates losing' types, so it looks like they are always fighting over me. But they weren't, it's fighting for the sake of fighting.

However—

That day after school, when I opened my shoe locker as I was about to go home, I saw 'that thing' that destroyed my naïve understanding.

It was a pink envelope.

Heat-shaped stickers.

And there was a slight smell of perfume——

"L-L-L-Love letter?"

It had to be a lie.

Childhood friend, girlfriend, don't tell me it's time for some 'third party' challenger debut?

Mayhem – the real mayhem is coming?!

#1: Childhood Friend's Love Letter? It's Mayhem.

#1 幼なじみのラブレター？で修羅場

Eleven o’clock at night, when I finished today’s studying for final exams—

Once again, I unfolded the letter I had received after school.

—I have always liked you.

—Let’s bind ourselves together again like we did in the distant past.

"Ah..."

I re-read it many times, regardless I could only sigh.

There was no name.

And because it was typed on a computer, I could not check the handwriting.

The writer didn’t even specify what she wanted to do.

This was some kind of prank and I should ignore it – Even though I rationally thought that, I felt 'If that were the case, it wouldn’t have been written like this.' If they were trying to see my flustered face from receiving a fake love letter, they would have written 'I looooooove Kido-kun! I have always stared at youuuu!'. Something along those lines, with above mentioned effect.

'Let’s bind ourselves together again like we did in the distant past.'

The implied overtones of this statement made me very concerned.

It exuded such a 'seriousness', it was impossible to take as a joke.

"Anyways, why meee?!"

I actually received a love letter, it’s abnormal! It has to be a mistake.

Speaking of which, this was why I hated 'love'.

The reason were my parents.

When I had been little, they used to say stuff like 'Even though our parents strongly opposed it, Dad firmly wanted to marry Mom!' or 'As long as I have Dad and Ei-kun at my side, Mom doesn't need anything else!'. But when I enrolled in middle school, the common everyday occurrence was seeing them fight, fight and fight, until at last they mutually agreed that their relationship as lovers evaporated. If my aunt Saeko-san had not taken me in, I do not know what would have happened to me by now.

Thus, I became 'anti-romance'.

'Romantic comedy is the best'! 'Love is everything'! I firmly sing discordantly against such system of values. In other words I'm just like that Natsukawa Masuzu. By being someone with the same values, I was naturally the choice to be her 'boyfriend'.

But, regarding the fact that I am 'anti-romance', only Masuzu who shares similar ideals knows.

It's not like I go around shouting stuff like: 'I am anti-love! I reject romantic comedy!'

The letter I have just received, it's not like doing that is going to make it disappear.

"Uuuun..."

Just where is the one who actually wrote this?

♦

The next day during lunch break:

"Hey, Kaoru, there's something I want to ask you."

"What is it? Why are you being so formal?"

My close friend, Asoi Kaoru, tilted his head, puzzled.

As long as there were no jien-otsu activities, I would eat lunch with Kaoru in the classroom. Since Masuzu and Chiwa were always playing around with me, I didn't know how 'relaxing' this time could be.

I don't think there is anything that can beat a good friendship between men, and Kaoru is a good guy.

"What do you think 'Let's bind ourselves together again like we did in the distant past' means?"

"What is that?"

Just after tearing a small piece of butter bread and putting it in his mouth, Kaoru wryly smiled. This way of eating made him seem completely like a girl, but it suited him wonderfully. His skin was white and his appearance was beautiful. If you insisted he was a girl, seven out of ten people would believe it.

"Nothing. When I was practicing the English exam, this was the translated answer to one of the problems. What do you think it means?"

Since I couldn't say it was a love letter, I used this kind of thing to cover it up.

After taking a sip of milk with his straw, he said:

"Generally speaking, it should refer to a former friend or a ex-girlfriend who want to mend fences."

"Mhm."

I also came to that same conclusion.

But I actually didn't have any 'ex-girlfriends'. Give the amount of experience I had as a 15-years-old, how could I have that kind of relationship? What type of riajuu would I be if I did? I would have replaced two kanji's of my name by the word 'popular'[10] if I did.

"And then there is also Chihuahua-chan."

"Ah? Chiwa?"

"A 'childhood friend'. From Eita's perspective, shouldn't the person who wants to bind themselves together like in the distance past be Chihuahua-chan?"

I was in the middle of picking up grilled salmon from my bento, when I unconsciously stopped moving my chopsticks.

"B-But, Chiwa and I are still getting along well. 'Bind ourselves together like in the distant past' would be a weird thing to say, right?

"That way of thinking, could it only be limited to Eita?"

Kaoru's eyes suddenly became mischievous like a child.

"From Chihuahua-chan's perspective, she might even want to get closer to Eita, at least that the feeling I get."

"Even if you say that, we are still close enough to dine together!"

"But——"

Kaoru temporarily came to a halt.

"The Eita of 'now' has a girlfriend. And that would be Natsukawa-san."

"[...]"

"From Chihuahua-chan's perspective, there's no way your relationship could be the same as before, right?"

That was a blind spot.

Now that I think of it, Chiwa has been very earnest reading teenage fashion magazines like 'Pachi Lemon', which has pages fulled with frivolous slogans from start to finish like 'Summertime ☆ Popucute ☆ Using Love Letters to get Boyfriends♪'.

Since Chiwa an easily influenced girl, it's quite likely that she was affected by the magazines, acting without thinking about her actions.

Yesterday morning, subsequently she came out with that out-of-nowhere line:

'From now on, why don't we go together to the school?'

Wrong.

Wrongwrongwrong.

W-W-Wait.

Why would Chiwa want to do something like that?

Chiwa d-d-d-didn't have any r-r-r-reason to do that kind of thing.

"What's wrong, Eita? You are covered in sweat."

I didn't have time to answer Kaoru's question, as I just shoved a fried egg in my mouth.

I just don't understand this.

About the egg, I intentionally put a lot of sugar, so it should have been sweet, but it was like chewing sand; without flavor.

—I have to confirm it!

Using assumptions to make decisions is very dangerous and I certainly am not the main character of a romantic comedy. It would be a disgrace to take the fish bait. I have to cautiously check on Chiwa before I can decide whether she sent the love letter or not.

Then after the confirmation——

"What should I doooooo?!"

"Wah— Eita, don't spit your fried egg out!"

In short!

In short: I wanted to confirm it!

♦

"Hey, Chiwa, the weather today is really nice, hahaha.."

"It's a really cloudy day."

—A sudden mistake already!

After school, I went to the jien-otsu club room.

Luckily, Chiwa and I were alone. Masuzu seemed to be busy and told me that she'd be late. So before she got back, there was no other way but to make the move at this time!

"R-Really? My judgment and everyone else's logic aren't the same. In my opinion, if the sky is around 80% cloudy, it's still good weather."

"Mhm—"

Chiwa disinterestedly muttered a little and took a huge bite of curry bread. She continued to fix her eyes on the other cabbage-and-sauce pork cutlet sandwich. Recently, she'd been snacking a lot after school. I've told her: 'Don't eat both sandwiches', but she replied: 'If I had a fried-pork-cutlet-and-curry sandwich, I would be fine with eating just one'. As expected of a woman who thinks entirely with her stomach. If we let her alone, maybe she'd cause a bread industry revolution.

"Ei-kun, how did you suddenly become so fidgety?"

"N-No, I haven't! How could I…?"

I lifted up my reference book and covered my face from her line of sight.

"And Natsukawa? Why isn't she here? Is she dead?"

"She said she had something to do and would be late twenty minutes or so."

"...So, for the time being, it'll only be the two of us."

The dialogue stopped here.

I stole a peek at Chiwa from the shadow of my reference book and found her with her head lowered bashfully. Half of her curry bread was unfinished; her face seemed very red.

What's going on...?

What is with this posture's appearance?

Even though I urgently wanted to face Chiwa and confirm it all, I couldn't think of a subtle way to ask about it.

What would I do if I confirmed everything, anyways?

If Chiwa answered 'Yeah, I wrote it', then, what should I do?

Would we 'start over' and 'bind ourselves together again like we did in the distant past'?

This would mean, Chiwa and me——

While I was still hesitating and pondering in this maze, Chiwa was the first to make an action.

hustlehustle She dragged her folding chair next to mine.

"Ehehe...♪"

Did she have some kind of plan? Chiwa pressed her shoulder against my shoulder.

"W-W-Wh-Wh-What are you doing?!"

"Ah, Ei-kun, I want to practice a little."

"P-P-Practice?"

Chiwa's hair drifted by and it had a warm milk-like fragrance, causing my voice to soften.

I always felt this smell was very nostalgic.

"Right, practice. Before I become popular, this is practice for when I get a boyfriend...!"

Chiwa leaned her entire head against my shoulder.

Rubbed it back and forth.

She looked just like a puppy, with her face rubbing my shoulder several times.

"Y-Y-You, d-don't misunderstand! This is just a 'club activity'!"

"G-G-G-Got it— It's the club, merely for the club!"

In the beginning Chiwa was a little shy, but gradually she began to rub closer and faster, so much so that her voice comfortably sighed a *kun* sound. She was really like a puppy.

"Ei-kun, do you remember?"

"W-What?"

"In the past, I used to always fall asleep like this."

"R-Really?"

"My mom and dad would always come home late, so Ei-kun would stay with me and play in the park until it got dark. Then we would always sleep on the bench like this, until someone came to pick us up, remember?"

"...I remember."

Chiwa's smell.

It was impossible for me to forget.

"Really?"

Chiwa put on a small smile.

"So it's not just me who remembers, that's great."

Chiwa muttered to herself, again began to 'rub back and forth' and *kun*.

At each stroke her fragrant hair brushed by my cheek.

Sigh.

Chihuahua was really comfortable...

—Wait, this isn't it!

This was a good opportunity!

After all the trouble, we are talking about the past, right? This is the perfect time to ask! 'Were-you-the-one-who-wrote-that-letter?' It's only eight words. I'll count to three and firmly say it!

Okay, come on!

3.

2.

1.

"W-Were sou te one who frote that lietter?"

Wuuaaaaahhhhhh! Why did I say it in Nagoya dialeeeeeeect![11]

"What's wrong, Ei-kun? What did you just say?"

"N-N-N-Nothing! Nothing! Ish Noshing!"

"I thought I heard 'lietter', was it letter?"

"N-No! What are you talking about? The lietter play! I was talking about the musical! Musicals made from sign language are rare in the world[12], so I'm really looking forward to iiiiiiit!"

Just as I felt like this excuse was about to explode, at that time——

"Knock-knock! Is anyone the~~re♪?"

Accompanied with this voice, an outstretched hand pressed Chiwa's face harshly down the table.

"Mukyu!"

This hand specifically and very thoughtfully used the half-eaten curry bread as padding below. Thanks to this action, Chiwa's face was forced into the predicament of tasting her favorite curry bread.

There was only one person in the world who could defeat Chiwa with such beautiful technique.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, Eita-kun♪! Your cute girlfriend has returned!"

Natsukawa Masuzu-san.

She came back earlier than I had expected…

"H-Hi! Are you already finished with your business?"

"Yes, I just went to the staff room to get some things."

Then Masuzu looked all around her.

"And Harusaki-san? Why isn't she here? Is she dead?"

"She's under your hand—!"

Chiwa snapped and stood up, her face thoroughly covered with curry.

"I apologize, I did not noticed, the only thing that I saw was merely a thieving cat, or rather, a 'thieving Chihuahua'."

"Who are you calling thieving?!"

"Taking advantage of when his girlfriend isn't around and snuggling with Eita-kun, you bring the concept of 'childhood friend' down on a national level, Harusaki-san."

I didn't know when Chiwa suddenly became the representative of all of Japan's childhood friends.

"N-N-No, this is a club activity! We're practicing for when I get a boyfriend!"

"You're a hundred years too early."

Masuzu hit the mark with her cut to the chase talk.

"I said it before, right? If you want to be popular, you have to finish reading this."

Masuzu put the cardboard boxes by her feet on the table and happily opened the boxes.

The cardboard boxes had some mail-order company logo printed on it.

What she pulled out from the inside of the box——

"JoJo?"

It was what Masuzu considered the Bible of shounen manga: The first volume edition of 'JoJo's Bizarre Adventures'. There were already more than 70 volumes already published, however the box only seemed to contain the first twelve volumes.

"This is reference material for the 'Society for Bringing Out Your Maiden Self' that I purchased with my own private expenses. This set of manga is for Harusaki-san to read, so she can carefully study what a truly fascinating person look like."

As Chiwa wiped curry off the side of her face with tissue paper, she said:

"If it's 'JoJo', didn't I already read it when I played guitar on stage last time?! "

"You only read the fourth part, right? That's unacceptable. You must start from the first part and read onwards. According to the NASA studies, it was clearly shown that 87% of girls who have a boyfriend have read JoJo starting from the first volume to the current one."

NASA is really impressive—

I thought they only launched rockets.

Like she was handling a treasure, Masuzu started to line up JoJo on the steel bookshelf.

"You bought this specifically for the club? Couldn't you just bring a set from home?"

"No! My own JoJo belongs only to me, just like how everyone can have only one

Stand, one person can only have one set of JoJo[13]."

And, as usual, she can go on and on with her JOJOJOJO talks.

How much does she really like JoJo? Even though I also like the series, but I definitely lose to her fanaticism.

After lining up all twelve volumes, Masuzu sighed as she stared at the remaining empty space on the bookshelf:

"My allowance has been used up, but if we actually received money from the club, we could buy an entire set[14]."

"Well, there is nothing we can do about that."

The 'Society for Bringing Out Your Maiden Self' only had three members, thus it was only considered an association of people with similar interests, without five members we couldn't be recognized as an official club and because we weren't an official 'club', we didn't receive any support from the school. The fact that we already had a clubroom was a big special exception to the rules.

Strange. But...

"Masuzu, weren't you supposed to be an ojou-sama from a good standing family?"

"What are you talking about, that is?"

Masuzu bluntly frowned.

"Nothing really. In the past, there was a rumor in the class that you were an 'ojou-sama' or 'she doesn't live in our world', so I thought you must have had a lot of pocket money."

"I've heard those rumors, too—"

Chiwa raised her hand.

Masuzu turned averted her gaze.

"Uun— Were there even those type of rumors about me?"

"Is it inconsistent with the facts?"

"Yes, *somehow*."

Still avoiding direct eye contact with us, Masuzu coldly spoke:

"Let's just say my allowance money isn't actually that much."

"I see."

Though it made sense, since rumors have always been unreliable.

Masuzu always was very classy and moreover she had returned from going up overseas, so people developed the stereotype that 'she has to be the rich daughter of a high class family', that kind of first impression.

"So you're saying, because the school doesn't recognize us as an official club, it's very difficult to purchase an entire set of JoJo?"

When I brought the topic JoJo back, Masuzu's brightened with joy.

"As long as we collect five members, I've heard that the school can recognize us an official club."

"So we need two more people?"

Forget it. That's impossible.

I couldn't imagine anyone, aside from Chiwa, who would be interested enough in this kind of club to join.

"Now that you bring it up, I was recently scolded by a disciplinary committee member."

Chiwa ate her flattened curry bread as she spoke.

"The person said that when I brought a guitar to school, it'd be a violation of school rules! I was harshly taught a lesson in the disciplinary room, even though I obviously didn't bring a guitar! Only the box!"

"Ah, that's most unfortunate."

I spoke as I nodded, but I silently praised the disciplinary committee members in my heart. At that time, I had wondered what I should do if Chiwa continued to walk around with an (empty) guitar case.

"I was also scolded before. For example: 'Don't do strange activities that disrupt the discipline committee'. Or: 'Produce actual results from club activities'. Basically, it looks like our club is being watched."

Masuzu shrugged.

Our school's disciplinary committee was known for its power and its strong influence on 'student self-government'. They express the opinion that problems should be solved before complaints arise. Against this enthusiasm and activism, even the student council had conceded defeat.

If that group was serious, our kind of club could immediately be dissolved.

Even the powerful Masuzu would only be able to obediently submit.

"So, today's topic of discussion is——"

Masuzu stood up, and wrote several large characters on the whiteboard:

'GET RID OF THE DISCIPLINARY COMMITTEE!'

I revolted at the preface.

As expected, she certainly wasn't someone who would go down without a fight.

"That's absolutely impossible!"

I stood up and rapidly erased the text on the whiteboard.

Masuzu had a very sour expression and her cheeks inflated.

"Why? How can you possibly know without trying?"

"Impossible is impossible! How can we oppose the disciplinary committee? Can't you

tell the result already!?"

"Then what should we do? Don't tell me you just want to sit tight and wait for death as they abolish our club?"

"If that's the case, try increasing the number of members we have and see how that goes?"

Chiwa suggested from the sidelines.

"Isn't an increase in membership the best result? If we get two more members, we can upgrade to an official club, and receive funding for club activities. We'd kill two birds with one stone."

"That idea is really great, Harusaki-san!"

Masuzu praised Chiwa, which was a very rare occurrence.

"To think that there actually *was* something inside that head! I wouldn't have believed it!"

And just as I thought it was praise, it immediately turned into derogatory insults. This woman certainly has a knack for raising you to the sky, and then smacking you to the ground.

"Fuu— What did you think was in my head?"

"A pilot."

"Hee, so I was being conducted the entire time——?"

Blue veins shot out on Chiwa's temples, as if a pilot driver had pressed down on a button. Chihuahua's mechanical structure really was amazing.

"Overall, I think this is a good idea and with that cowardly Eita-kun will have no objections?"

"Sure."

I felt that if they wanted that, they could do whatever they wanted. With the semester about to end and during the period when life goes up and down, it was impossible to

find new members; and as for being called cowardly, I'd pretend I never heard it.

"So what are our specific plans? Marketing activities?"

"Should I go talk to my classmates in the go-home club?"

"No, that doesn't work."

Masuzu shook her head.

"This illustrious club has no place for weak-willed people like that. If it's like, 'It doesn't matter the price, let me enter the club' or 'If you do not let me join your club, I will commit seppuku[15]! ', unless it's circumstances like these we wouldn't be able to call ourselves remarkable young maidens."

"[...]"

From a very long time ago, I thought that this girl's 'young maiden's vision' was absolutely deviated from the norm.

"In short: As long as we can demonstrate our special charm to the school in order to attract people, we will be fine."

"So specifically what will we do?"

"Theme song."

"Ah?", Chiwa and I simultaneously voiced.

"We will create a theme song for the 'Society for Bringing Out Your Maiden Self'."

Masuzu faced the dazed two of us and winked:

"The power of songs should not be underestimated. It can end wars, cause the enemy to reform and start afresh, overthrow the last boss – They can transcend the boundaries language and international borders, even beyond the ethnic divide and they propagate strength. This is a song."

"That much I can understand."

"In addition, the so-called song is also a 'symbol'. Asides from national anthems,

school songs, club songs and including the theme songs of anime or TV soap operas, as soon as one hears a particular song, they will think 'I can remember hearing this song', furthermore their faces will change when the content of the song is heard."

As always, it was meaningless but persuasive speech.

If it worked, I had no comment.

"Having a theme song is very good, but can you compose it?"

"Me? Like if I could do something like that."

'What is this pig dreaming about', was the message that I could read in Masuzu's eyes as she glanced me. Was it this pattern again?

"Harusaki-san, do you have any experience composing?"

"Why would I?"

"Then, Eita-kun."

"Impossible."

Masuzu let out a 'Puu' as her shoulders dropped.

"You're such a group of useless people."

"You don't have the qualifications to say that about others!"

"But I have first-class qualifications as an architect the 'shelf of the mind[16]'"

"Don't make up strange national qualifications."

"Then we will attract a new member who can compose a theme song!"

"But we wanted to write a theme song so we could attract new membersssss!"

The composition of a song was thus delayed and we first tried to make lyrics.

Because the lyrics were meant to grab a maiden's heart, I was not responsible for anything. With the final exam as my priority, my goal was to reach the local National University School of Medicine under school recommendation. With that kind of

ambition, I couldn't regularly let my test scores slide.

"Even so, can the two of you really write poetry?"

"Well, I kind of like it?"

"As a maiden, I've written a poem or two."

"Eh...?"

Never mind Masuzu, but even Chiwa could write poetry. It was frankly really surprising.

Now that you mention it, I've always felt that the love letter had been written with a very poetic flavor.

♦

After the end of club activities——

I left earlier than the two of them and arrived at the shoe cupboards first. Waiting for me there was another familiar pink envelope.

I checked that there were people's shadows around me and my trembling hands opened the envelope.

—Ah, please notice 'my true feelings' soon.

—No matter the era, even as the river slips by, only our bindings together can never be shaken.

I thought that this time, there was a little more poetic charm than the last.

But because Chiwa should still have been in the clubroom, did that mean the person who put this letter in was in fact someone else?

No, that was not necessarily so.

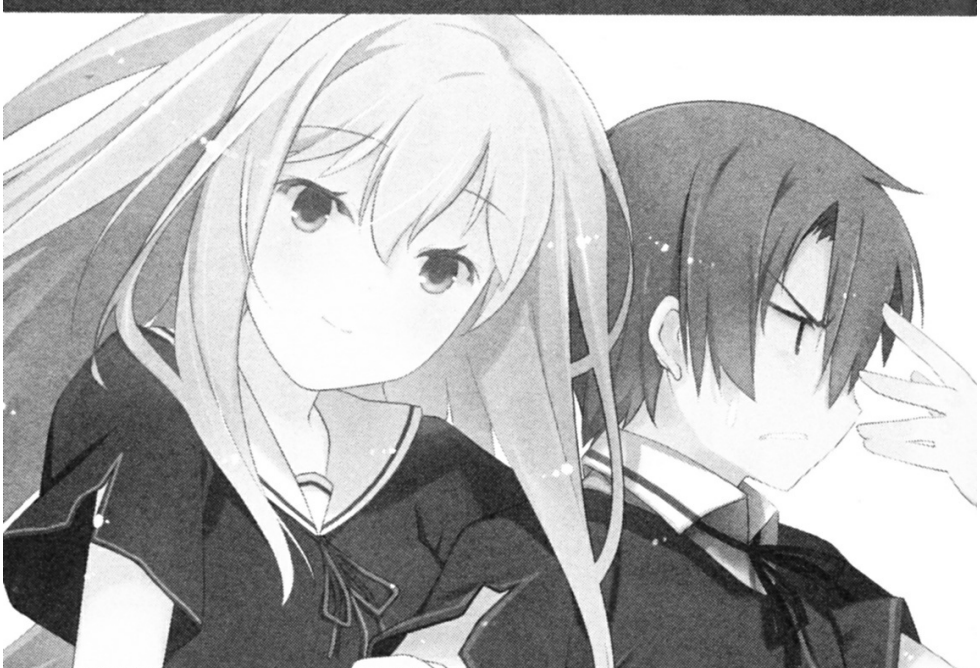
Ever since the morning, I hadn't been near my shoe cupboard, so there were many opportunities to slip the letter in.

Even so, this letter was the same as before. There were no specific details.

What was I supposed to expect?

#2: A Maiden's Poem is Mayhem

#2 乙女のポエムは修羅場



After a restless night, morning came.

Ever since I had received the love letter, I couldn't study no matter how much I tried. With my mind unable to concentrate, I procrastinated late into the night and by the time I fell asleep it was already three o'clock in the morning.

As I rubbed my bleary sleepy eyes on the way to school, Chiwa, who was walking next to me, put on the appearance of a big sister and asked me worriedly: "Did you stay up all night studying? Or is there something on your mind? You can always talk to me about it."

Well—

By just looking at the way she acted, Chiwa couldn't possibly have anything to do with this.

She isn't the kind of person who can pretend and play dumb, I'm the one who knows that best.

But if that was the case, I couldn't think of anyone else who would want to 'bind ourselves together like in the distant past.'

Although this wasn't anything to brag about, in Elementary and Middle School, I had almost no female friends. If I traced my memory back to kindergarten, there was actually one; but her name and appearance had already faded from my memory, thus I couldn't confirm it.

With my head in a daze, the day went by. After school——

"Somehow, you don't seem to have any energy today, Eita-kun."

The moment I entered the clubroom, I saw Masuzu with her eyebrows furrowed.

"Yeah, I didn't sleep well."

"That's not good. Even though it's right before exams, you shouldn't stay up all night."

What she said was practically the same as what Chiwa told me in the morning. She smiled sweetly.

"Well, you can use our poetry to get rid of your sleepiness."

"Oh, you've finished it?"

Chiwa, who was eating a pork cutlet sandwich, stood proudly straight with an 'Of course!'.

"I've always felt that when I bring a pen to paper, it's going smoothly! We've completed very powerful masterpiece~! The members will certainly be surprised!"

"R-Really."

Chihuahua, what about studying for exams?

On her last midterm exam, it seemed like your paper was entirely filled with red…

"Well, why don't we start with Harusaki-san's presentation."

"We're reading it right here?"

"After all that difficulty, you've finally written a poem. If you're not going to read it, what are you going to do with it?"

Chiwa privately turned to herself,and murmured: 'Eeh ~ what should I do~?' Her body twitched back and forth nervously and the sight of her doing that was very annoying. Who was this girl? Her character changed so much.

"Then, forgive my baldness[17]!"

She must have meant to say, "forgive my boldness". I was not tsukkomi-ing.

Chiwa stood in front of the whiteboard, surrounded by the attention of Masuzu and me, and began to read her poem aloud.

"For Bonds with You, Wan-Wan, Nya" Lyrics by/Cyute: Chihuahua.

♪ *Love, love, wanwan[18], wanwan nya~*

♪ *hey, hey, hey you, hey you,*

♪ *cut my hair, did you notice?*

♪ *it's only 3 centimeters, but did you notice?*

♪ *so the distance between us is only 3 cm*

♪ *the bindings between us are only 3 cm*

♪ *to shorten it to wan cm, I'll try my best?*

♪ *Love love, wanwan wanwan nya ~ (repeat x3)*

"[...]"

"[...]"

Coming up with as response was very difficult, as I did not know how to react to poetry.

I was expecting a more run-off-the-tracks work, but I never imagined it would be about the feelings of a 'maiden'. If this had been written by an elementary school child, maybe it would be praiseworthy… But it was already freshman year of high school. One couldn't write 'wan, wan, nya' at the very least, first you have to make clear whether it's meant to be a cat or a dog.

Even so...

What was with your 'bindings'?

So, after a surprising new direction, was Chiwa the person wrote the letter?

No, I am over-thinking it...

"Hey, what do you think?"

Chiwa's eyes glittered with brilliant light. She looked at Masuzu and me, as if she wanted to say: 'Praise me, praise me ♪'. If this girl really were a Chihuahua, she would definitely be wagging her shaggy tail right now.

Masuzu had originally been silent with her head down, but——

"...Frivolous."

"Huh?"

"It is really, incomparably frivolous!"

She stood up and slammed the table.

"Harusaki-san, what did you turn the poem into? What is the purpose of this frivolous writing, what's with the 'love, love', what's with the 'wan, wan'? Did you really think you could use *that* to demonstrate a maiden's soul?!"

Masuzu really became angry.

Even though Chiwa was a little frightened, she still said:

"W-Wh-What!? Love, love and wan, wan are also very cute, aren't they?!"

"Furthermore about the theme, what's with love and what's with romance? That's where you went wrong in the first place. That's called a 'love-struck mindset'. You never thought about showing the essence of human kind, or the hesitation of a lonely soul—— Aaaah, forget it! Facts speak louder than words!"

From the bag on the chair next to her, Masuzu took out a notebook.

The cover had a very familiar coke stain.

Right, that was my notebook from eighth grade!

"Waitwaitwaitwaitwaitwait, Masuzu! What do you think you're doing?!"

"Here, I'll let you listen to the real poetry *he* wrote! And then tremble under its magnificence!"

"This world is rotten" Lyrics by: BURNING FIGHTING FIGHTER

♪ *This world is corrupt*

♪ *so let me punish it*

♪ *you assume I'm a child and mess with me?*

♪ *everyone calls me 'Rampaging Animal' (Beast)*

♪ *I will turn everything into nothing (Zero)*

♪ *me, me, me, me, me, oh! Zero!*

Stating 'Now we just hold these dirty wings tightly...'

♪ *Oh yeah, adults are so dirty~*

♪ *Oh yeah, adults are so dirty~*

♪ *Oh yeah, adults are so dirty~*

♪ *Oh yeah, adults are so dirty~ (Fu-Fu-!)*[19]

"Aaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhh! Stooop iiiiiiiiit!!"

It hurts.

It hurts, it hurts, it hurts, it hurts, it hurts!

It hurts a looooooooooot!

"What do you think, Harusaki-san?"

Masuzu gorgeously ignored me rolling on the floor, and smiled proudly.

"This is the emergence of the lonely soul, real poetry is supposed to be like this. Can you understand the difference between your levels?"

Chiwa snorted and said:

"Like hell I'll understand! What is a 'Rampaging Animal' (Beast), some kind of rural gang[20]? At the very least pick a better name!"

I'm sorry.

"And the 'Oh! Zero' part, too. What kind of taste is that? Why are you using a Samba rhythm? All of this is trashy writing on pretentious spirits. It sucks!"

I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry.

"'Adults are so dirty' is so serious! Is there a reason to repeat it four times? Does he have some kind of hatred with adults?"

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry! At that time my test scores were really bad and my allowance was reduced. I was in a bad mood, so please forgive me!"

"Why is Ei-kun crying?"

The tears in my face dripped stickily, and snivel streamed from my nose, falling close to Chiwa's feet.

So dirty...

I really am just the dirtiest...

"Oh right, that poem was written by 'the guy of the notebook'. What did you write?"

Chiwa said this as she wiped my face with a tissue.

"Fufu, you want to hear it?"

"Don't delay it with an act! Just speak and I will enjoy laughing at it!"

"Fine."

With a serious look on her face, Masuzu took out a sheet of paper and began to read aloud.

"A Beautiful New World Not Known to Anyone" Lyrics by: SUMMER_RIVER[21]

♪ *Let's go, no need to cry anymore*

♪ *as long as I'm with Eita-kun, I'm not afraid*

♪ *lun! lun! lun!*

♪ *turn over mountains, cross the sea, climb over valleys,*

♪ *then we've arrived at the promised place*

♪ *Harusaki-san did not respond*

♪ *just like a corpse*

"WHY DID I DIE?!"

With a loud voice, Chiwa tried to tsukkomi.

"Why? Why the body? What happened after turning over mountains, crossing the sea and climbing over valleys?"

"It was unfortunate, probably the attack of an enemy Stand[22]."

Masuzu finished the tea in her cup, sighed and looked as if she felt accomplished.

"Oh, and why is it only you and Ei-kun together?"

"Since this is our club's theme song, so I incorporated an easy-to-understand relationship between club members."

"Ah? If that's the case then I also...!"

Chiwa violently scribbled something rapidly on her notebook.

"I'm finished with my new work! You two should listen to me carefully!"

"Childhood friendships are very good, very, very *good!" Lyricis by/Cyute: Chihuahua*

♪ *Since little we always, always*

♪ *Ei-kun and I had a close relationship*

♪ *I must take good care of Ei-kun, who is like a little brother*

♪ *look, look, there's bento food stuck on your cheeks*

♪ *okay, okay, I'll help you clean it up*

♪ *hey, Ei-kun, look over there*

♪ *Natsukawa Masuzu is a rotting corpse*

"Fum... Rotting corpse..."

The temples on Masuzu's face twitched as she mumbled to herself.

"When you were flirting with Eita-kun, what happened to my body in the end?"

"Who knows? Isn't it because an enemy sutando[23] attacked you?"

Chiwa said as she happily chewed on her Japanese-style pancake.

Masuzu slowly stood up.

"Since you've decided to do this, I, Natsukawa Masuzu, will not hold back[24]"!

With flames burning in her eyes, Chiwa also stood up.

"If you think you can do it, then give it a tryyyyyy!"

—Thus, the world's worst poetry contest began.

♪ *Eita-kun and I are lovers, love, love, kyun*

♪ *the brainless childhood friend today as well shows useless resistance*

♪ *she gets kicked by a horse, it's ok if she dies*

♪ *Ei-kun and I are childhood friends forever, always very close*

♪ *the bindings between us will last until forever*

♪ *meddlesome Natsukawa is a light bulb*[25]

♪ *just step on poop and die!*

Ah, by the way:

What was I doing this entire time? Of course, I was studying for final exams.

Anyways, after all, Japan's education qualifications are high level!

♦

When the skies outside began to darken, the two of them were finally exhausted of their efforts.

"T-Today, let's just count it a tie..."

"Fine, it's getting really late, anyways."

Chiwa's shoulders rose up and down, largely gasping for air, as Masuzu brushed aside hair damp with sweat from her cheeks. The two of them temporarily concluded with a truce.

"...Then, what are we going to do about the theme song?"

I asked them this as I picked up my schoolbag with my studying materials. Masuzu

nodded and said:

"That's kinda bothersome. Why don't we just mix everything together?"

"This Rotten Wanwan is a New World" Lyrics by: 'Society for Bringing Out Your Maiden Self'

♪ *Love, Love, wanwan, wanwan, nya~*

♪ *everyone calls me 'Rampaging Animal' (Beast)*

♪ *Harusaki-san is just a corpse*

♪ *oh yeah, adults are so dirty~*

♪ *Natsukawa Masuzu is a rotting corpse*

♪ *oh yeah, adults are so dirty~*

♪ *Eita-kun also incidentally died*

♪ *oh yeah, adults are so dirty~*

♪ *love, love, wanwan, wanwan, nya~ (Fu-Fu-!)*

"WHY DID I END UP DYING?!"

I raised my voice because they had really overdone it.

"But Eita-kun is way too sly for trying to be the only one surviving."

"Exactly, Ei-kun! It would be too frustrating if you were the only one left!"

Only on this issue, can the maidens unanimously agree in unison.

The 'Society for Bringing Out Your Maiden Self' has chosen a theme song!

And they have also ensured that the disciplinary committee will be watching!

New members definitely, definitely, definitely will not come!

#3: After school with My Girlfriend is Mayhem

#3 彼女との下校は修羅場

It was finally only a few days before the start of the finals.

The majority of clubs had already stopped their activities, but the 'jien-otsu club' continued to hold meetings as usual since Masuzu said: 'being a maiden does not have days off', I wanted to say: 'I am not a maiden, so let me off already', but I figured they wouldn't listen anyway.

But today, because one of Chiwa's classmates wanted a study session for their exams, the club activities were canceled. She even sent me a text message asking if she should refuse the invitation, but I told her to go with it… If she didn't study at all, she would've be in trouble.

I expected Masuzu would refute strongly, hence I didn't expect her to understand the case so easily.

"We haven't gone home together in a long time. Why don't we do so today?"

Ever since the start of jien-otsu club activities, the three of us would all be going home together, so we hadn't done anything like this in a long time.

The 'boyfriend' agreement, after all, originally only considered 'go home together every day', so you could say that we were merely using the contract in its original form.

But...

"Why do you have that unhappy face?"

Masuzu switched her shoes, placed them in the cupboard, and smiled at me with her back to the setting sun.

"Is it because our previous after school date, you are wary of any conversation? Today look forward to it."

"Gre~at, leave it to me~"

An interesting conversation topic——

...Aaah.

How bleak.

I walked out of the school gates side-by-side with Masuzu and the attention of students all around focused onto us immediately, piercing us like needles. There was also a whispering sound. 'Hey, it's Mr. Popudou[26]!' "So today it's not Chihuahua, but the ojou-sama?', 'What should we do? Should we pray to him?', 'I heard if you pray at morning, noon and evening, eventually you'll get a lover.' I had no idea when such strange beliefs did start appearing. The person who wanted to rely on gods was obviously me.

"Eita-kun."

Masuzu said while hanging onto my arm.

"Why are you doing this so suddenly?"

"Please stick a little tighter, otherwise we won't look like a couple."

Thanks to the short sleeves, I could perfectly feel Masuzu's body temperature as she clung to me. Somehow, it made me feel like I wanted to run away.

This girl's body is just way too soft…

I pretended to be calm as I walked and said:

"What are you talking about *now*? At this point our relationship is the hot rumor of the whole school."

"No. Because Harusaki-san often comes home with us - the three of us together - there's been some suspicion about our relationship. So we have to show off a little more from now on."

Masuzu hugged tightly, *tightly* close to my arm. With or without Chiwa around, we kinda stood out. I already felt that somehow… I already felt that anyhow… Aa—Aaahhh!

"A-A-A-A-As such is the case, we should partake in some conversation? It doesn't matter what it is, we should talk about something!"

"Yes, well then—"

Masuzu's eyes were already brimming with anticipation as she looked up at me:

"Eita-kun, did you watch yesterday's 'Magure Punishment Extreme'?

"—!"

This woman...

What was is planning?

'Magure Punishment Extreme' was a popular TV series with an average rating of 18.5%. It focused on hardcore human emotions and was popular among men and women of all ages. Even I, who didn't really watch TV, never missed an episode of this show.

However, the last time we talked about 'Maguke', Masuzu said the show was 'Whatever it's fine'. It was a really humiliating memory.

Well, today I would officially make her understand the charm of 'Maguke'!

"But of course I watched it."

I carefully chose words for the conversation:

"I think the most interesting quality of Magure Punishment Extreme is the father-daughter relationship between the police protagonist Yasuura and the Yuki-chan. This episode specifically focused on this. The day of Yuki's birthday, he was meant to lead a big drug search. The degree to which Yasu-san 'tenaciously' hated drugs was already portrayed in previous episodes and everyone knows how that 'devil Yasu' turns sweet whenever it's about Yuki-can. This caused a split between 'tenacity VS affection' one could ultimately only pick one! Which one would Yasuura pick? It really made the fans anxious like crazy and pinched with cold sweat. The arrangement of the last episode of the season was really amazing! This contemporary drama's steady structure is really rare, this is godlike! The best show ever!"

The last part was the same as last time, but whatever.

I honestly thought that, so I tried my best to communicate my ideas to her.

Masuzu nodded vigorously:

"'Tenacity VS Affection', what a wonderful thing to say."

"Isn't it?"

I unconsciously clenched my fist: *You did it, Yasu-san!*

"Though, could you repeat the explanation of that...?"

"Huh?"

"I've never seen that TV drama."

"How can that be!? Then, why did you ask me about it?!"

"Well, I thought if I brought up a topic in Eita-kun's area of expertise, it would satisfy your insignificant self-esteem?"

"Insignificant? You're calling my feelings towards 'Magure' insignificant?!"

Masuzu quickly shook her head, she was like a cap as she quickly escaped from me.

"No, I meant minced meat[27]."

"That's some greasy self-esteem that you're talking about! Is that what you meant? You mixed up self-esteem with deep-fried[28]? You actually meant self-esteem chicken it? Hahaha!"

"Right, right, fascinating, fascinating! Anyhow, I want to change the subject."

"You don't want to keep going?"

I was nearly crying. Wait, in fact, I was already crying...

"Wuwuha! W-W-Why do you want to change the t-t-topic? A-W-Wfter all that trouble, could i-it be thanks to my gag that could finally start an energetic conversation...?"

"Forgive me, forgive me."

I don't know why Masuzu apologized to me twice, but she rubbed by back.

"Well, I'll go buy a few drinks for us from the vending machine over there, I feel like having something cold, so let's help ourselves."

"T-Thank you..."

I did not expect Masuzu to be so mild.

But somehow I felt as if she were tricking me…

"Here, Eita-kun, some sweet red bean soup."

Ten seconds later, I realized my hunch was correct.

"...You... wouldn't happen to hate me, right?"

"Absolutely."

"Didn't you say you would buy a cold drink?"

"It is ve~ry ~ co~ld. Feel it."

I took the canned red bean soup, which was in fact ve~ry ~ co~ld[29].

Why would they sell this kind of thing…

It would have been very strange to drink while standing, so we sat down on the bench near the vending machine. This was a quiet residential area, located in an obscure area, so there were practically no pedestrians in this quiet place. I could even hear the wind chimes of the neighboring homes and it would have been unbelievably elegant… if I weren't drinking red bean soup!

Masuzu was drinking canned oolong tea as she spoke, surveying the sky. 'They are very beautiful, those sunset clouds. ' From the side, she looked almost expressionless and it made one wonder whether or not she really believed it was 'beautiful'.

She was one of those people you could never guess what she was thinking.

I felt as if the more I got to know her, the more the amount of her dark sides seemed to increase.

"Eita-kun."

"What?"

"There’s something you should be saying to me, isn’t there?"

Masuzu attentively stared at my eyes as she spoke,

"There is actually something that you are hiding from me, right?"

"W-What are you talking about?"

"You’ve been stealing looks at Harusaki-san these past few days."

Oops.

"I-I never did! Why would I want to look at Chiwa?"

"Fuun, don’t pretend to play dumb."

When Masuzu leaned her face close to my ear, she said:

"Those who protect me, Bi Mai Angels[30]."

"Guuh?"

I unconsciously looked at Masuzu’s face.

Her eyes were laughing.

"The most embarrassing entry from your Chuuni notes... Do you want me to read it aloud right here?"

My whole body burst out in cold sweat.

That...

That isn't good!

Even though there are a lot of black marks on my history, the shame of reading 'That One' out loud in public, which is one of the most embarrassing out of the top five. It had five times the destructive power of 'Rampaging Animal' …I did not have the confidence of maintain a normal mental state during *that* one.

"M-Masuzu! You!"

"I've said it before, Eita-kun."

Masuzu suddenly narrowed her eyes and said:

"'Don't be so kind to other girls right in front of me. '"

"I-I have n-not been kind to Chiwa at all!"

"It's the same. Even though we're fake, you are still my boyfriend, so you're not allowed to look at other women."

Really...

How strong are this girl's possessive feelings?

Whether it's fake or real, things that were mine stay mine!

"No matter what you say, I can't tell you."

"Think? It doesn't matter even if I read aloud your notebook?"

"Even if you do that, I can't, absolutely not!"

As a human being, one should never reveal the contents of a love letter to other people.

It was the same regardless if Chiwa wrote it or someone else.

"I see."

Masuzu sighed and said:

"So after all, to Eita-kun Harusaki-san *is* special... "

When she finished speaking, she lowered her shoulder, sank into silence, and gave off a very lonely appearance. She stared at her empty oolong tea can.

...Is she not going to read from the notebook?

....Of course it's not like I want *her to read it.*

It's just that normally I think that Masuzu would just read everything aloud the

moment I refuse her.

—But this time.

There was a sudden change in Masuzu's expression.

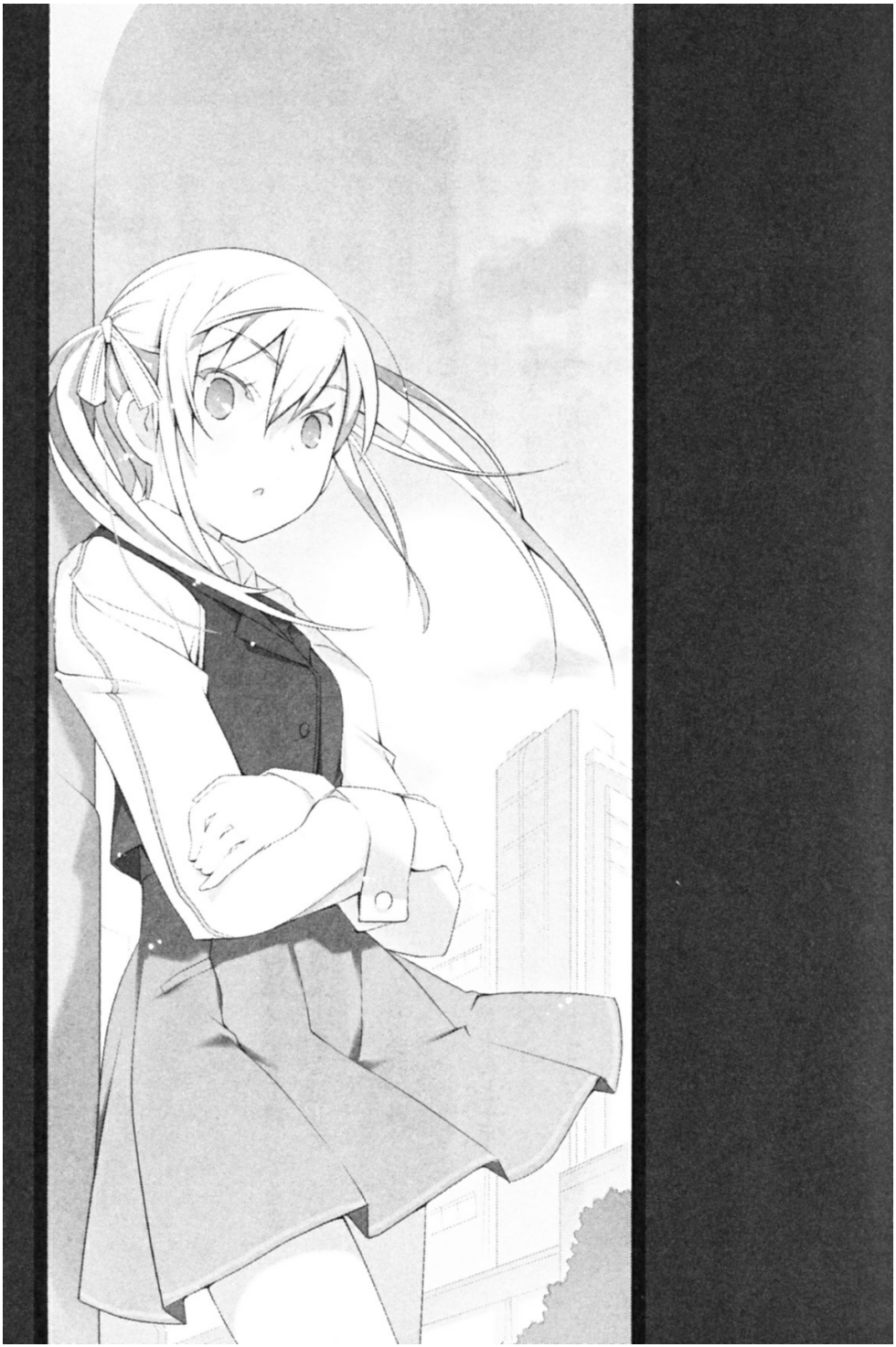
Astonished, she opened her eyes wide, her cheeks stiff, while staring forward a little —— no, it would be more accurate to call it glaring.

I was unconsciously fascinated by looking at this Masuzu, since this expression was a rarity among rarities.

As a result, I was late by a few moments before I realized *what* Masuzu was looking at.

"Eh? Is this guy Suzu's *boyfriend*?"

The first thing I saw was two bundles of tied golden hair floating by me and a little girl with blue eyes.



Blonde.

She could easily be classified into a four-character idiom with that kind of stereotypical, albeit very old-fashioned combination – 'Emanating Intense Aura Standing Before Others'. It was like the residential area around this girl had been cut open into space.

She wore the uniform of a famous private middle school from the neighboring town, which was on a totally different level from our public school. The design was high level and very fashionable. 'It's very difficult to look good while wearing those kinds of uniforms', Chiwa told me that before, while pretending to know things she didn't. On this girl's body, it looked completely fitting… Was it because the quality of the person who wore it was very high? This girl was someone who lived in a completely different world than me.

Masuzu spoke in a very coarse voice:

"Mana, you, what are you..."

"Because I wanted to see Suzu's boyfriend."

It took me a little before I figured it out——

When this girl said 'Suzu's boyfriend' earlier, she actually meant 'Masuzu's boyfriend'.

"Fuu-m..."

The girl called Mana approached my face, laughing, and examined me from head to toe several times. Highly inquisitive, she left nothing unexposed and it made me feel uneasy.

After thirty seconds of examination, she smiled and said:

"Somehow, he gives this totally plain feeling."

Tche! How can she say something like that with such a broad smile?

"Anyhow, you don't really like Suzu *at all*, right?"

"Eh?!"

She saw through the fake boyfriend act? But how?

I could not help but turn around and look to the side. I only saw Masuzu with her head bowed, her hair covering her face.

Masuzu clenched a fist on her knees, she spoke:

"Mana, don't say things like you know everything. What can you possible understand?"

As soon as she finished, the girl immediately burst out into laughter. "Ahahahaha!"

"Just kidding! I'm just teasing you. Like always, you are weak to those things. For that very same reason you always make Papa worry endlessly."

I let out a sigh, relieved. Apparently this girl had been bluffing.

But... Papa?

Normally, this would refer to this girl's father…?

"What are you doing here now? Did that man order you to do something?"

"Yup, he wanted me to take a look at your situation. Even though we were on the phone, the tone of his voice was very angry! He said he didn't let you come back to Japan to fool around randomly. It seems he found about your school affairs through a representative politician or something?"

Masuzu's body began to tremble severely.

The girl spoke in a gentle voice:

"Sorries, did I scare you? I'm kidding, it's nothing. I'll stand up for you. Silly, I wouldn't say anything bad enough that it'd upset Suzu later!

Because she was wearing a middle school uniform, she must at least be younger than Masuzu – but this girl was totally treating Masuzu like a child.

I never expected that the audacious Natsukawa Masuzu could actually be this afraid of anything.

"Because of that, Suzu; In exchange——"

The girl soon turned her eyes towards me.

She approached me.

As I sat on the bench, I tried to lift myself up to escape – but the girl shoved her chest against mine.

While I staggered, the girl brought her face close to me and said:

"Suzu's boyfriend, just let me have him!"

My lips were kissed by her.

The girl named Mana, whose lips were a lot smaller than mine and soft, seemed as if they were almost sucked into mine.

"——Guu—?!"

She kept her eyes open and staring at me, seemingly because she did not want me break away from her. Her bluish-green pair of eyes seemed to contain a radiance of mischievous childishness.

After our lips were in contact for a few seconds, it ended.

She rapidly pulled her body away, and looked neither shy nor timid as she licked her lips and said:

"Plundering complete! Thanks for the meal♪!"

I could not even moan in reaction.

Masuzu face seemed to lose its color and she stared at the girl in a daze.

At this time, a large black limousine pulled up beside the vending machine. From the driver's seat, a tall black bald man wearing sunglasses stepped out. Why did he look as if he were a bodyguard not just a chauffeur?

The man respectfully saluted the young girl:

"Ojou-sama, it's time."

"Ah, is it?"

The girl said as she solemnly combed her blond hair.

"So, Suzu, you should consider it before the next time we meet. All aspects of it."

Masuzu did not respond.

"Onii-san, let's do a little more than just kissing next time."

This arrogant manner of speaking made me very angry.

"You're just a middle school student! Don't talk like you're an adult! Just who is your Onii-san!? Don't be so familiar with me!"

"It's not wrong to call you Onii-san, right?"

The girl opened a window from the back seat of the car, smiling.

"After all Natsukawa Masuzu is my Nee-san."

"What——?"

"I am from the middle-school section of the Nenaka Private Girls School, third-year Natsukawa Mana. Just call me Mana, since you're my future Onii-san♪."

Even after the limousine left carrying the girl, I was still unable to move.

What?

Masuzu's sister?

"Hey, Masuzu! What was that about—"

"Don't say anything."

She flatly refused.

"I also have things I don’t want to talk about. Aren't you just the same?"

Masuzu said without looking at me, her hair covering her face.

Her tight shoulders expelled an aura of rejection.

"...I get it."

I gave a big sigh and scratched my head.

Even though I wanted to ask about her sister, I also had a secret in my love letters, so I couldn’t complain. There was nothing left to try even if I was impatient.

I only understood one thing.

My very own 'girlfriend' – I don’t know anything about her.

#4: When my Girlfriend Changes into a Swimsuit, it's Mayhem

#4 彼女が水着にきがえたら修羅場

The next day during lunch.

Like always I planned to spend the short break with my best friend.

"Eita, did you and Natsukawa-san have a fight?"

Kaoru asked while drinking a strawberry milk box.

While putting away the empty bento box, which I had just finished, into my bag, I replied:

"You're really perceptive about these things."

"It's because the two of you haven't said anything to each other since morning."

"That might be true."

Even though we weren't deliberately ignoring each other, it was definitely very difficult to start a conversation. After we said 'good morning' to each other when we arrived at our seats, I hadn't heard Masuzu's voice. Since Masuzu always disappeared during lunch break, she usually wouldn't be here.

[...]

[...] [...]

...It's not like I'm feeling particularly lonely or anything!

"What's the cause?"

"How should I put it? Because we both have secrets we keep from each other, eventually we ended up with this awkward atmosphere."

"Secrets?"

"You could call it the so-called 'sense of distance'."

"Why is that?"

"Ahh, it's just like..."

I scratched my head.

"Since I also have a secret, I shouldn't pry about the other's secrets. If I'm not going to talk about mine, I can't ask her to talk about hers. As a result, it feels like we are unusually distant."

Ugh——

I always found it hard to express myself.

However, I was only clear about one thing, and that was Masuzu and me have felt between each other this 'distance'.

"I see."

Kaoru tilted his head, puzzled.

"Having secrets is bad?"

"Of course, regardless if one's relationship is friend or lover."

As soon as I finished speaking, Kaoru suddenly replied with a serious face:

"By the way, Eita."

"Yes?"

Kaoru only hesitated a moment and spoke with lowered eyelashes:

"Actually, I'm a girl."

"Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahahhhhhahahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh?!"

I cried from my chest with all my strength.

Kaoru lifted my hand with teary eyes and said:

"I have always kept this hidden from you, so please forgive me."

"Wait a minute, wait a minute!"

"In fact, I[31]'ve always liked Eita, so let's kiss."

"No, wait a minute!"

Kaoru, whose face was extraordinarily beautiful for a boy, quickly l-l-l-leaned f-f-forward.

W-W-Wh-What kind of situation is this?!

In any case, this story was too excessive! This was also not how one should act in a classroom during lunch break!

As the tip of our noses almost collided, Kaoru chuckled and said:

"As if, it's just a l•i•e♪."

"[...]"

Because I was reassured so suddenly, I almost wet my pants... Even though I was a high school first-year.

"Did that surprise you?"

"Of course I would be surprised!"

Aaahh, I'm dripping cold sweat.

Kaoru could easily be mistaken as a girl from his looks that it was begging for jokes that devastated the heart...

"Do you understand now? Secrets are for this end, for something of this degree."

"No, I don't understand at all. Where is there a relationship in this?"

"What I'm trying to say is 'revealing a secret does not necessarily improve the relationship between two people'. When you heard that I was a girl, how did you feel, Eita?"

"Surprised."

"You were troubled, right?"

"I was troubled."

"There."

Kaoru gave a little wink.

"It’s fine if confessing a secret solves the dispute, but if it doesn’t, it might just disturb the other person. Don’t you think that keeping secrets is a form of being 'considerate'?"

"...I see."

If you say it like that, it's quite possible.

That love letter was my own problem and it was not something that Masuzu could solve. The task of 'determining whether Chiwa wrote it' was my own responsibility.

The matter of Masuzu’s relationship with her sister was the same. At this stage, there wasn’t anything I could do about it.

"I hate feeling that 'concealing a secret leads to a bad relationship'. This would make anyone feel suffocated. Does Eita also think like that now?"

Thanks to Kaoru, I swept away the haze in my heart.

Even though my relationship with Masuzu is fake, we undoubtedly have a relationship as classmates and we are members of the same club.

After all, it's not like we started going out because I wanted to find out about the secret of that person whose name is Mana.

"I’ll try talking about it with Masuzu."

"That would be good."

Kaoru smiled and nodded.

At this time the school bell sounded, so there were five minutes before the end of lunch break. The girls left the classroom in groups holding onto sports bags. The next class, fifth period, was swimming class, so they were going to change in another room.

I looked at Masuzu’s seat and there was no sports bag, so she must have intended to change clothes directly after eating lunch. I would probably have to wait until after school before I could talk to her.

"See you later, Eita."

Kaoru left empty-handed.

"Huh? You're not changing clothes?"

"My skin is poor, so I can't expose myself to the chlorine from the swimming pool nor stay in the sun. Thus I'll have to sit out. Last year was the same, right?"

"Ah, now that you mention it, I remember."

When we were in the same class as third-years in middle school, Kaoru had to sit out almost all of the physical education classes, and never attended the few swimming lessons we had in a year. It had to be vexing.

"Thank you for hearing my worries."

"Don't mention it."

My best friend smiled shyly, and walked out of the classroom.

Ah...

If he was a girl for real, 'she' would be incredibly popular with the students.

♦

The midsummer sun shined on the pool surface.

After warming up to all sorts of radio exercises, the physical education teacher announced: 'Today's swimming lessons... free time!' Us first-years gave a big cheer.

This was also quite favorable for me —to take advantage of this opportunity, I'd talk with Masuzu a little.

In the middle of the sound of water splashing and people diving into the pool, I looked for Masuzu everywhere.

——*Found her.*

Masuzu was holding her knees, sitting by the shadow of the of the school fence, with a rather large towel covering her hand and everything above her knees. It was probably to protect herself from the greedy look of boys who would otherwise continuously and perversely look at her.

"H-Hey."

"...Hai."

Masuzu responded softly, with an absent-minded expression, as if she didn't intend to continue talking with me. Our lines of sight didn't cross and she stared straight at the swimming pool surface.

"You're not going to swim?"

"Yeah, I don't like to get wet."

"It's a pity, since we finally have a swimming class."

"…That's how it is"

"I-I rather like swimming, though I'm not good at long-distance swimming or competitive swimming. I prefer leisurely swimming breaststroke and floating on the water while playing around—"

"[...]"

Wuh! This conversation didn't go anywhere.

As expected, it has to be because she was still angry at me for hiding the secret concerning the love letter…?

A temporary retreat.

I kept my distance from Masuzu and sat at the edge of the pool.

Just as I was thinking about how to start up a conversation, I heard the sounds of girls whispering to each other in groups while in the swimming pool.

"What's with that? She feels like being all prim and proper by herself."

"She’s an Ojou-sama, so she probably thinks the school pool is dirty and doesn't want to swim?"

"Isn't she just doing that to attract the attention of the boys?"

"Even though she already has a boyfriend, what is she thinking——?"

That's the good old enviousness as always.

Apart from Chiwa, I have never seen her talk to other girls. Even though having a boyfriend could protect her from the confessions of other boys, she was still helpless against the ill feelings of all the girls.

At this distance, Masuzu could probably hear them.

If it was the usual Masuzu, she wouldn’t even blink from the malicious talk of the 'jealous club', but——

"H-Hey, Masuzu."

"...What is it? You have been at it for a while".

"Nothing —I actually don’t feel like swimming today."

As I received Masuzu’s cold glare, I sat down next to her.

So, what should we talk about…?

It was probably too risky to have another conversation about 'Maguke'.

At a time like this, as expected, we should talk about *that* —Bizarre Adventures.

"If we could use the Ripple like Joseph and Caesar to walk on water, I think it would be pretty fun. I rather like the Ripple battle from the first and second parts, because the Stands are easy to use and have a lot of variation, which suits well to a weekly publication. But to use ripple, one must practice a lot, you agree? Becoming strong through practice is probably the best part about battle mangas and I especially like the scene from part two, they train Ripple while climbing on the pillar covered in oil—"

At this moment, Masuzu suddenly stood up.

"Wh-What is it?"

"I'm going to swim a little."

"E-Eh? Didn't you say you hate getting wet?"

"I changed my mind."

Masuzu left me and quickly walked away.

Damn, I didn't expect that even the JoJo topic would be unable to go through.

She was rather angry and the situation was perhaps getting worse.

When Masuzu stood at the edge of the pool, the voices from the noisy classmates suddenly weakened. Everyone's eyes were on Masuzu and I could tell that they were all looking forward to her removing the towel.

Masuzu pulled off her white colored towel, and hung it on the wall… everyone simultaneously gave a gasp of admiration.

I also could not help but be enchanted.

With her silver hair fluttering in the summer wind, reflecting glistening and shining sunlight; the white of her naked shoulders dazzled the eyes and it made everyone feel that keeping it under the sunlight was a pity; Her navy blue school swimsuit tightly clung against her shiny and elastic skin, showing all kinds of miraculous curves and tone combinations on her body lines.

The boys were, of course, speechless and even those girls who were saying bad things a few moments ago had a stunned look.

As for Masuzu's fan, Yamamoto-kun from the soccer club, he lost consciousness and fell into the pool.

I thought she would enter the pool like this, but Masuzu only looked at the surface of the water while standing the entire time.

She used the toe of her right foot to dip the surface a little, but she seemed hesitant.

The jealous club again began to murmur and say bad things:

"What's that? This isn't a bath."

"Does she actually know how to swim?"

"Kyahaha, so even for that she acts as if she was important!"

Masuzu, who could not bear the all this slander, jumped into the swimming pool with a splash.

She started to swim crawl style.

Honestly, her swimming technique couldn't be called beautiful even for a stretch — her hands and feet were moving wildly and even though she made huge splashes, she didn't move forward. Every time she took a breath it seemed like she was nearly drinking water.

With a beautiful maiden revealing this kind of unbecoming scene, the class could not help but burst out laughing. The guys who had marveled at her just moments ago, in the end just turned out to be such a group of fickle rascals.

After a short while, everyone got tired of watching Masuzu and went back to playing in the water.

Even I was about to consider going to swim——

"What is she doing...?"

About halfway across the pool at the 25 meter mark, Masuzu's movements suddenly became very strange.

Even though she was trashing her hands and feet just like before, she no longer moved forward and her swimming cap floated up to the surface and sank. The hands that I thought were furiously drawing water, were now motionless——

"I-Isn't she drowning?!"

I hurriedly jumped into the pool.

I supported Masuzu's exhausted muscles above the water, afraid that she had already drunk a lot of water. She was completely motionless. The swimming cap that shed off of her silvery hair looked like a jellyfish's tentacles drifting on the water.

I borrowed the strength the boys all around me and finally succeeded pulling Masuzu onto the pool deck, but what followed was the real problem.

pant— *pant—* Masuzu squinted her eyes very painfully and the sound of her breath seemed staggered and irregular. It sounded really bad, so was it necessary to give artificial respiration?

"Sensei, please come quickly!"

I cried to the other side of the swimming pool, but the physical education teacher was already giving artificial respiration to someone else.

The teacher was rescuing Yamamoto-kun.

This was really an unexpected development.

You are quite interesting, aren't you?!

You are indirectly killing the Masuzu that you like so much!

—Enough, I guess I'll have to.

A lot of people flocked to the area around us. Half of them were absolutely confused, while the other half fixated their sights on me with great anticipation in their eyes.

That's right.

Mouth-to-mouth respiration is pretty much kissing.

Everyone was looking towards the rumored couple (laugh), having one of them or 'me' giving a one-sided fierce kiss to the other, you could feel the great expectations.

They were mixing up the act of saving a person's life with a love event from a gal-game.

"I'll say it beforehand."

I let Masuzu lie face-up on her back, placed my hand on her forehead after checking her respiratory tract was not blacked, and pinched her nose.

I sucked in a big breath.

"Kissing in reality is, just the act of sticking two mouths together, you love-struck

minded peooooooopleeeeeee!"

I used my lips to cover Masuzu's lips, slowly blew air into it twice, and then temporarily pulled my lips away. I counted five seconds, and then blew again, causing her chest to move up and down slightly. I repeated this action quite a few times.

Even though I had the knowledge of CPR, this was my first time practicing it, so I was worried whether or not I was doing it properly —but when Masuzu coughed and spit out a large amount of water, I was so relieved I nearly fell to the ground.

The physical education teacher who has successfully awakened Yamamoto-kun then rushed here.

—Masuzu was saved!

I lied down next to Masuzu's side and looked up at the sun as I cheered!

Great.

I don't want her to die just after we had an argument.

Even if we are just a fake couple.

♦

When Masuzu woke up in an infirmary bed, I was on the chair next to her flipping through my English vocabulary book.

Because I was accompanying Masuzu, I skipped my sixth period English class. Even though missing class just before exams made me feel uneasy, I still wanted to see if she was safe in the end. To this point, you could count it for the better or worse.

"...Eita-kun?"

Masuzu pulled up her upper body to a sitting position, bewildered to find out that she

was in the infirmary.

"I was drowning, wasn't I?"

"A-Ah, yes, maybe, just a little."

I spoke vaguely because the impression of Masuzu hanging her shoulders dejectedly made me feel pity for her.

"How embarrassing, I'm a high school student too."

"...Haha."

For some reason this way of speaking was really cute, so much that I thought that I couldn't help but laugh.

Masuzu was displeased as she pouted:

"Is there something weird?"

"Well, for instance drowning and being a high school student have no relation with each other."

"Is it like that?"

Her downcast appearance from lowering her head made her look younger than usual, almost as if she wasn't Masuzu at all.

"Was the one who saved me Eita-kun?"

"Not just me. The sensei and the class also helped."

"...Thank you."

I don't remember Masuzu to have ever thanked me with such an obedient attitude, it's making me a little nervious.

"D-Don't misunderstand! I just felt that if you died just after we had a fight, I wouldn't be able to sleep well!"

Ha, I gave out tsundere vibes, I started to feel annoyed at myself.

After a short period of silence, Masuzu faced me in the eyes for the first time that day.

"My attitude to you yesterday was very strange. I'm sorry."

"...R-Right."

M-Masuzu has—

MASUZU HAS APOLOGIZED!

I can't believe it...

This isn't some sign that the earth is about to end, is it?

"No, I am also at fault as I was concealing something as well. However Kaoru said, that by doing that——"

"I..."

Masuzu interrupted my explanation.

"When that child kissed Eita-kun, I felt something extremely unpleasant."

Eh?

"So I didn't know what kind of expression to put. Kissing is just a mouth touching another mouth, I have always thought like that."

"...So..."

So it was actually about that———

I thought she must have been angry because I concealed my love letter from her!

Because I wouldn't normally think of that!

By the time she had her first kiss with her boyfriend to claim 'It's a JoJo Reference♪', she is the type of woman that could do that*, so I never expected she would be rattled by that kind of kiss meant to spite others!*

...If I said that *aloud, it would probably make you very angry, Masuzu-san.*

"If it’s due to that, then don’t worry about it anymore."

I tried to dispel the emotional uneasiness and made a great effort to speak in a hearty voice.

"It has already been overwritten."

"Overwritten? How's that?

"Well, is that the... k-kiss; the one from the girl named Mana has been completely overwritten!"

Masuzu looked blank for a moment, but immediately looked as if remembered something. She put her hand to her mouth and said:

"Was it artificial respiration?"

She was really worthy of being Masuzu, for having such sharp wits.

...No, maybe because I blushed, she could probably tell. Since a few moments ago, my face had been hot like crazy.

"S-S-So it's like that..."

—Hey, why is even your face blushing? And your voice sounds embarrassed?

Shouldn’t you calmly state 'I see. It must have been hard for you' without any second thought? That's how it should be for the anti-romance ones.

"Ah, it’s just like as you said. A kiss is nothing more than a mouth and mouth touching, nothing more. It isn't any different with artificial respiration, and even the kiss with the girl named Mana. The way I think is 'so what?', so… b-basically you can just ignore it!"

"I understand."

After giving a big sigh, a cheerful smile emerged on Masuzu’s face.

"Let's forget about it, Eita-kun."

"Eh—?"

"Let's forget everything that has happened these past few days! Let us brush this off in one stroke and forget about it until everything is clean."

"...Let's do that."

I thought that this was for the best.

Just as Kaoru said, rather than growing distant by caring about the secrets, it was better to forget it and let each other solve one's own problems.

At least, until the day we could reveal to each other everything that came along.

So—

"I understand and I'll forget about it. Starting tomorrow I'll be as usual."

As I replied in this way, I made up my mind.

I was determined to solve the mystery of the 'Love Letter' that had been bothering me since several days ago.

Was the person who wrote that letter actually Chiwa?

I would confirm this directly tonight.

"Also, Eita-kun."

While I was thinking about how to confirm this with Chiwa, Masuzu called out to me.

She squinted her eyes and said embarrassedly:

"I as well, really, really like it... the second part of JoJo."

♦

Masuzu did not attend any more classes before school ended and went straight home.

Since the after-school club activities were canceled, I had the opportunity of talking

with Chiwa ——while we sat together during dinner.

While I was eating fresh tonkatsu, thinking about how to mention the love letter — something happened.

"Hey, Ei-kun."

The soft and quiet sound of the usually spirited Chiwa surprised me. She whispered:

"When you were at the pool today, is it true that you kissed Natsukawa?"

Yes.

If I think a little about it, it's easy to understand.

Even if my girlfriend and I put everything behind us with one stroke——

This actually didn't include my 'childhood friend's' say in the matter.

#5: Childhood Friend's Room is Mayhem

#5 幼なじみの部屋で修羅場

Apparently, Chiwa had found out about the news from a text message sent by the girls of the class.

Subject:【*What Should We Do?*】

Eita gave Natsukawa Masuzu a huge kiss!【*Chihuawan!*】

Really, why did it had to pop up that love-struck mentality of that crowd of love-worshipers, did everything have to become 'love, love, kiss, kiss' or they won't be satisfied?

But even if I voiced a complaint, it was useless.

After all, whenever some strange prejudiced information reached Chiwa, she basically considered it fact.

Of course I immediately turned to her to explain the reason. I originally decided to use tonight's dinner to discuss the love letter business, how come something this bad happened whenever I planned something?

"It *wasn't* a kiss, merely just artificial respiration! The teacher was taking care of another student, so I was the only one left to do it. The struggle to save human lives is always a race against the clock."

"That much, I understand[32]."

Chiwa pouted unhappily and turned her face to the side.

"So don't think about it too much. Artificial respiration is just mouth and mouth *contact*, that's all."

"...Then do it with me, ah."

"Do what?"

"Artificial respiration."

I almost spit out my miso soup. In the end, seaweed and soup mix leaked from my mouth, blocked in the depths of my nose

"W-W-Wh-What are you saying?!"

"But! But!"

Chiwa cowered and timidly played with her fingers near her chest, revealing her childish habit to be troublesome. She had already entered that 'sulky Chihuahua' mode.

I think she understood the reason.

Because Chiwa was originally part of the kendo club, her awareness of first aid and medical treatment was probably greater than mine. If the other person had not been Masuzu, she certainly wouldn't be acting as spoiled as she is now.

As a result, that night's dinner ended with that awkward atmosphere and Chiwa went home. A third of the fried pork cutlet was left unfinished… That Chiwa actually didn't finish her meat, such a rare occurrence.

Thus, the love letter confirmation could not be resolved.

...Ugh.

Nothing seems to go as planned lately.

I wonder why Chiwa and Masuzu's relationship is this bad?

Was it because of that? Like the reason why a 'mother-in-law and daughter-in-law' have a bad relationship? In other words, the childhood friend is the mother-in-law, and the girlfriend is the daughter-in-law?

But, there was no mother-daughter-in-law relationship in the world that was so clearly incompatible.

Don't tell me there's no trick to keep a 'girlfriend' and 'childhood friend' on friendly terms with each other?

♦

The next morning.

Since I also wanted to go to school with Chiwa, I was waiting for her in front of her house.

I wanted to make up with her as soon as possible, because I didn't want to keep dragging on the confirmation of the 'love letter' business.

I listened the cicadas in the courtyard and waited for ten minutes —even though is past the usual time, Chiwa still has not come out.

Did she leave early because she was angry?

Without any choice, I rang the doorbell on Chiwa's home. The person who came was actually Chiwa's mother.

"Ara, this is Ei-kun, long time no see! How are you?"

"A-Ah, it's been a while."

I was embarrassed and at a complete loss, because it was very rare for Chiwa's mother to be home at this time. She was some kind of local newspaper reporter, so she always left for work early and came back late. It was the same with Chiwa's father, but he was home even less often.

"Have you been going to school together with Chiwa lately?"

"Yes, we just started to again, not long ago."

"Really? Then Chiwa must be quite happy!"

Auntie's voice was high-pitched even though she was tall. At first glance, she didn't look like Chiwa at all, but her eye-squinting mannerisms were exactly identical, just like mother and daughter.

"But Chiwa, she ah, has got a fever since last night."

"Eh?"

"I took the morning off work to take her to the hospital, but I still won't get back home until late tonight. Sorry, Ei-kun, but could I trouble you to take care of her?"

"No problem, it's nothing."

No wonder Chiwa didn't eat very much last night. Because she rarely caught colds, I had assumed that she had only been in a bad mood.

...Damn!

How did I not notice? It's embarrassing, especially since I want to become a doctor.

During the course of the day I was almost completely absent-minded, even though the classes just before final exams were very important. Chiwa lingered in my mind the entire time. I just imagined the look of Chiwa ill in bed —it reminded me of the circumstances of *that* time.

I told Masuzu I was not going to club activities today and then hastily rushed home.

After changing clothes, I started the washing machine and then immediately headed for Chiwa's house. I used the spare key to enter through the front entrance and planned to hurry up to the second floor —but then I remembered Chiwa might be sleeping, so I carefully tiptoed up the stairs.

"Chiwa, it's me."

I knocked on the door.

Ten seconds later, there was no response.

"I'm coming, I'm coming in."

After giving my warning twice, I slowly turned the doorknob.

It's been an extremely long time since I'd last scene Chiwa's room. It was already very different from what I recalled in my memory… Basically, the pinkness increased. In the past, her room was plastered with kendo posters, with sports tape, old shinais and the like scattered around. Now it was replaced with drawstring bags, cushions

and small things like that, especially the mirrors that were placed on quite a few sides. It was kinda suspicious to see some much time.

However, only the scent of warm milk was exactly the same.

This was the smell of Chiwa.

Chiwa was sleeping in a bed like the one she had in the past. She seemed to have some difficulty breathing while asleep and her face was flushed.

As I planned to go downstairs to wring a towel, the futon started moving.

"Ah... Ei-kun?"

"Sorry, Chiwa, did I wake you up?"

"...Err, Is it really Ei-kun? Ei-kun in my room...?"

After just getting up, Chiwa looked as if she were in a trance and blinked her eyes.

"Auntie asked me to take care of you. Now don't get up, you can go back to sleep."

"That was quite good! Really, that mama..."

Even though she spoke with that tone, Chiwa seemed to beam with joy, squinting her eyes in happiness.

"Your fever doesn't seem to be gone yet, so is there anything I can do to help you?"

"...Can you help me to clean my body?"

"——?!"

"O-O-Okay."

Even though I consciously avoided the waver in my heart, my voice became quiet.

I grabbed a wash basin from the first floor and went back to Chiwa's room with a towel.

Chiwa knelt all alone in bed and had taken off the upper top of her pink pajamas —her back was naked towards me.

"Be gentle, please?"

"I-I-I-I know!"

I held onto the twisted towel and sat down on the bed.

Close to Chiwa's back, I could see that her skin was delicate and beautiful. I had thought that she simply was not yet developed, but her body had all the round curving characteristics of a maturing girl, especially her two soft white arms. It made my mind exceptionally uncomfortable.

"Fuhya!"

When I put the towel on Chiwa's back, she shuddered.

"Really! I told you to be gentle."

"S-Sorry..."

I cautiously proceeded to wipe her little back. My heart emitted a loud throbbing sound and I was worried that Chiwa's ears would hear it. Every time Chiwa shyly moved her back or gave an 'Nnnnn...' sounding sigh, my heart nearly flew up into the ceiling.

"Thank you, Ei-kun, I'll wipe the front myself."

"Y-Yeah."

It was finally over...

While Chiwa wiped her body, I kept my back to her and glanced at the inside of her room —there really were a lot of small trinkets, like cosmetic bags from the appendixes of fashion magazines, shoujo manga, scented candles and so forth. Her interests truly weren't the same as they had been in the past.

Eh?

The thing that hung on the desk lamp, it seemed very familiar…

"N-No! Ei-kun, that's not good!"

I stood up, and picked up that thing.

A pair of painted red chopsticks.

A cute pink ribbon tied them together.

Why was there a pair of chopsticks hanging in a place like this?

And —aren't these my chopsticks?

"...Sorry, I took those from Ei-kun's home without permission."

When I heard this, a thought flashed through my mind.

"Are these the chopsticks from that night?"

Chiwa nodded.

As expected of childhood friends. Merely saying something like 'that night' was enough to understand.

Because between the two of us, there was only one *'that night'*.

That was the night when my parents disappeared and there was a dead end in my life. Chiwa had slipped out of the hospital even though she was hospitalized and we had hamburger steak together. It was the first time I had ever cooked in my life.

The chopsticks from then were this pair.

"But why did you want to keep this kind of thing...?"

"...Because that was my most important memory ever."

Chiwa's face flushed.

Her eyes were moist.

It's the fever fau—... No, probably not.

"Only that memory in my heart is absolutely always the same, even if Ei-kun has a girlfriend or likes other girls."

"...I see."

I nodded, firmly believing what Chiwa said.

The person who wrote the letter was not Chiwa.

Because we did not need to 'bind ourselves together again'.

After all, my bond with Chiwa has always, always been inside of us, ever since that time.

♦

In the end, I stayed overnight to take care of Chiwa.

Chiwa's parents contacted me and told me they wouldn't make it home today, which was very commonplace in Chiwa's lax household. On this kind of days, Chiwa used to come over to my house to stay… But this had been in elementary school.

Even though auntie apologized non-stop on the phone, I didn't think it was a big deal. I was already planning on studying for exams late into the night and as long as I brought my study books, it didn't matter where I studied.

Chiwa was sleeping the entire time, with no improvement on the fever. Just a moment ago I had wiped water on her forehead, but the towel on her forehead was already warm. I needed to change the water in the washbasin.

When I was about to stand up from beside her pillow, Chiwa suddenly gently tugged at my sleeve.

"...Stay with me."

"Chiwa? Are you awake?"

No, her eyes were still closed, so she was asleep.

Is she having a nightmare because of her fever?

"Are you alright with Natsukawa?"

"Huh?"

Chiwa very painfully shook her head and said:

"Do you like Natsukawa? Even more than me, you like her?"

Her voice was disturbingly sad.

"Am I no good? Why? We've always, always been together..."

Clear tears slid down Chiwa's face.

"Don't go anywhere. Always stay with me, Ei-kun…"

I again sat down by Chiwa's side.

I firmly grasped Chiwa's hand outstretched from the quilt.

"It's all right, Chiwa."

"[...]"

"I'm right here, I'll stay here with you."

Chiwa's painful expression gradually eased.

The rate of her breathing also returned to normal, so she probably fell into deep sleep.

I used my empty hand to pull over an English reference book.

I wanted to double and redouble my efforts in studying.

In order to achieve the goal that I promised to Chiwa that night in the past.

♦

I woke up to the shimmer of light that shot through the gap in the curtains.

It seems that I had accidentally felt sleep —while still in a sitting posture, with my face laid on the bed and my shoulders covered with a pink blanket.

The bed was empty.

"Chiwa?"

"I'm over here, Ei-kun!"

I looked back, and saw Chiwa's smiling face, while she sat facing my back on a chair.

"Wh-What are you doing?"

"Ehehe, I'm just enjoying the sleeping posture of Ei-kun♪."

"I'm not talking about that! Don't you have high a fever?"

"Well, I'm OK now, thanks to you..."

Chiwa seemed to look healthy and stood up to spin in a circle to show me.

"Really? Let me take a closer look."

"I said I'm fine already! Really! Ei-kun *so* loves to worry!"

Chiwa laughed as she prepared to flee, but I adamantly put my hand on her forehead.

...Well, all right, her body temperature was nearly normal.

She gave a 'See? Didn't I say so?' expression on her face, stuck out her chest and said:

"Actually, it looked like Ei-kun might catch a cold, so I covered you with a blanket! When Ei-kun isn't with me, you're really hopeless!"

"Che, what you talking about?"

Well, since Chiwa had the energy to bicker, there shouldn't be a problem.

I looked at the alarm clock and it was already seven ten in the morning.

"Huh? Where does Ei-kun want to go? My mother will be returning soon, so you should eat breakfast and then go—"

"No. I want to go to school early so I can study and prepare for the exam in the quiet classroom."

"What?! Ei-kun would've never said something so cold in the past!"

"Yeah, yeah."

Chiwa mustered an unhappy face.

"Maybe, I should get another cold again..."

"Aa? What are you talking about?"

"Uun? It's nothing?"

Chiwa shook her head.

"Ei-kun, about the artificial respiration."

"What, are you still going to bring that issue up?"

"No, I was thinking you're really awesome, to formally execute it and succeed! For that kind of technique, even if you know how to do it, in a real accident very few people can do properly. Where did Ei-kun learn how to do it?"

"...Where from, really? Just from a book and didn't we learn how to do it in physical education class?"

"And you know how to do it from just that? Really amazing—"

"Fufun, fine, praise me more then."

—Though, to say the truth, it was actually not that impressive.

After Chiwa was hospitalized from a traffic accident, I went to a life-rescue workshop

run by the fire department, to receive full training from senior firefighters.

This was just in case if Chiwa ever had another accident, I wouldn’t be so helpless again.

I also was taught other methods and techniques relevant to body injuries.

...Of course, I kept all of this is a secret from Chiwa.

If I said something, she'd start asking for payment.

"So long, Chiwa. Let's meet again in the club room."

"Ah, wait for me, Ei-kun! I'll also leave for school early. Just give me five minutes to get ready."

What a boisterous morning.

The usual morning that you could expect with a childhood friend.

#6: The Truth About the Love Letter is Mayhem

#6 ラブレターの真相は修羅場

About the thing, how did the tale continue?

Ah, I had been trying to find the person who sent the letter, but in the end I found myself back where I started.

If it wasn’t Chiwa, then I had to give up. I had no clue about the 'bind ourselves together again', so of course I had not 'come to a conclusion' about this matter.

"Maybe it was really just a prank after all...?"

I had no choice but to go back and reconsider the possibility I had initially rejected.

Because the writing was so mystifyingly complicated, I had assumed it must have been a real love letter. But if I thought about it more carefully, it still could have been a trap to make me think that Chiwa wrote it. They probably wanted to make fun of me and stage an embarrassing dilemma between Masuzu and her. If that were the case, it made sense. My recent actions probably pleased them a lot.

After understanding this point, I could only disregard the letter.

If I wouldn’t have reacted at all and went on with my usual life, the mysterious person would probably think they had failed and gave up. Summer vacation was waiting right after final exams, so there wasn’t any reason to make a big deal out of this.

Thus, final exams started and I concentrated all of my energy on the tests. Even Jien-Otsu activities were suspended. It's been a long time since I immersed myself in a daily life of only studying. Thanks to this, I had a very good feeling about exams and I could probably keep my rank as number one in the class. But just when I started feeling relieved——

Monday morning, the week after exams ended.

After I went to school with Chiwa and opened my shoe cupboard...

—I cannot bear it. I want to see you.

—Today after school, I will wait for you on the roof.

"Ei-kun, is there something wrong?"

Because Chiwa suddenly peaked, I had to shove the letter in my pocket while being flustered.

"Was that a handout from before? The one inside your shoe cupboard?"

"A-A-Ah, that was a sheet of English translations! I thought I lost it, but it seems like a kind person picked it up and put it in here."

"I thought I saw something written like 'after school', 'the roof', or something?"

"T-That was the question that was supposed to be translated into English. It was a very hard question."

"Hard? 'After school' is just 'AFTER SCHOOL[33]', right?"

"No, you missed the trick, Chiwa! It actually reads 'after set on fire'! So 'AFTER BURNING[34]' is the correct answer!"

"[...] ...Fu~unm."

Pheww, my ingenious cover-up worked.

After Chiwa left to go to Class E, I walked down the corridor towards Class A and my brain worked at top speed.

It looked as if the criminal's strategy was turning more direct to lure me out.

I could only think of two possible outcomes.

First, they'll watch me wait alone on the roof in vain and then laugh at me from afar.

Second, Masuzu's and Chiwa's male fans will appear in a mob, surround me and beat me up.

Neither of which was a good thing.

I felt that my best choice was to ignore it —No, since the other party has finally made a concrete move, it was probably better to accept the challenge directly. Compared to

further harassment in the future, it was better to burst the bubble now and remove it.

I wanted to clearly tell this person: 'Stop writing these boring letters!'

♦

So, school finally ended.

I waited in the strong breeze on the roof for the criminal to arrive.

Also, this was my second time visiting this roof.

The first time was to practice confessions with Chiwa, but it was a huge failure. Why did these confessions have to be the black marks in my history? That I couldn't possibly understand.

It did not seem like there would be happy memories associated with today. 'Fights that result in a new friendship' only happen in the world of manga, right? I just wanted to protect my dominant hand so my studying would not be obstructed.

I took out my cellphone to check the time, and it was just about four o'clock in the afternoon. Because the letter only said 'after school' I didn't know when the other person would come. Earlier I had checked all around the roof, but there was no sign of anyone hiding. There was only one entrance to roof, so if I just kept watch on it, they would probably come from there.

After about five minutes, the wind started blowing stronger again——

The rusted iron door slowly opened.

"It's here—"

I prepared myself.

How many people are there? Three people? Five people? If it's two, then give me a break. Are they in the same grade? Or in a higher grade? If they are classmates, then I'd honestly admit defeat—

"...Eh?"

But only a single girl appeared.

There was nothing impressive about her appearance.

She was wearing our school uniform, even though I did not know why she was wearing the winter uniform.

While I was unsure of how to react, the girl quickly walked up to me. I thought she was going to say something to me, but she just quietly held out a portable game console from her chest.

Then the background music to the role-playing game practically everyone knew started playing on the roof.

"...?"

W-What?

Why did this girl come to this place?

The person who wrote the letter can't be this girl! Impossible, she didn't even say anything and continues playing the game. But why is she playing on the roof? And why is she playing next to me?

I stole a peek at the side view of the girl and was taken aback. She really was an incredibly cute girl.

The crown of her head was a kind of 'doll-like' hair that was very rare nowadays. With her moist shining black hair, just considering her dark hair could increase her cuteness level by 500%. But if you looked at this girl under the sunlight, she looked absolutely delicate and adorable, especially her big watery eyes that would impress anyone. The wind blowing her long eyelashes made her appearance quite beautiful.

If only she didn't lack a smile, she could probably be on par with Masuzu as a popular, glamorous maiden. However, her expression was a complete 'poker face' and I felt as if her eyes were out of focus, or filled with some kind of foolish atmosphere... Was she sleepy? It was exactly that 'drowsy' feeling.

At this moment, the girl handed me the game.

"Huh? W-What?"

The girl still wore a poker face, even as she used all her force to push the game onto my chest.

She seemed to want me to look at the screen.

Well, there wasn't a choice and I had to look. I discovered that the screen displayed the status information of four units.

Lv.87 Hero - I

Lv.85 Warrior - LOVE

Lv.83 Monk - U

Lv.1 Magician - ♥

"[...] [...]"

What a unique team. Even though a hero, warrior, monk, and magician are part of a common team, the names were too personal. You couldn't just name the magician… '♥'. What was that, and why was it the only one at level one?

If you strung it together, it reads 'I LOVE YOU ♥'? [35]

"[...]"

Now that I mention it, this girl's face was quite red…

Starting just a few moments ago, she had begun to act all shy and uneasy.

Her hands that held the game trembled, and it looked almost as if she was about to drop it.

Yes, she looks like— yes, just like a girl who confessed to the boy she liked.

No.

Wrong, wrong.

It can't be, it can't be.

"[...]"

"[...]"

T-The silence is very heavy!

Since she didn't say anything, the atmosphere was very awkward.

Basically, it is up to me to start the conversation? Should I say something like, 'that's a pretty cool party'? Or 'you are all set for dungeon-hunting'? No, why do I even have to talk about games with a girl that I don't know on the roof? Right, the criminal who wrote the love letter better come now! At least it would be better than this current situation. It doesn't matter if they are Masuzu's fans or Chiwa's fans, just come!

We both remained silent for over five minutes.

There was no one else on the roof.

"[...]"

"[...]"

It can't be...

This girl couldn't be the one who wrote the love letter?

But this was inconsistent with 'bonds of the distance past'. No matter how I looked at it, this was the first time I had met this girl. I figured she was in the same grade as me based on the figure of her body. In reality I couldn't recall any impression of ever seeing a face like hers before.

"As expected."

"—!"

This girl finally said something!

"I presume Eita has not retrieved all of the memories of his past life, so I will try 'communication' with the language of this world."

"Eh?"

What is this girl talking about?

"Have you deciphered the meaning of the 'magic spell' I just showed you?"

"Spell? —Do you mean the 'I LOVE YOU ♥'?"

The girl blushed.

"It means 'revive bonds' in the Hebrew language."

"[...]"

Hebrew is like that?

There's even a '♥' letter?

"I am called Akishino Himeka in this world, but my real name is 'HIMEKA • Sei[36] • HEAVENSRAIN'. And——"

The girl who called herself Himeka mustered a noise through her nose and very proudly said:

"In my past life, my name was 'Holy Dragon Princess of Dawn'."

Aahh...

So that's the case...

It has to do with 'past lives'...

"In my past life, I confirmed an intense bond with the 'Holy Dragon Knight of Dawn', Kidou Eita."

"Eeehhhh?"

"I've wanted to see you all along, Eita."

The girl jumped into my arms and hugged me tightly. Her body was very slender, and it seemed she would break if I tried to shake her off, so I didn't even move.

"W-Wait! Give me a moment, Akishino!"

"No, I want you to call me 'Hime[37]' like you did in the past."

"W-W-Well, Hime, how do you know the thing about 'Holy Dragon Knight of Dawn'?!"

"I sank into the snare of love in my past life, a vowed to fight the Evil Dragon Clan together with you until the end. But when the *Ooi naru yami* advanced in the final battle and all living things perished, I utilized a higher dimension to escape and reawakened my consciousness through alchemy—"

"I wasn't asking about the *'setting'*!"

Hime who still clung wrapped around my back, raised her head and said blankly:

"I don't really understand what Eita intends to ask."

"Where did you hear that I was the 'Holy Dragon Knight of Dawn'?"

"Point EKME."

"— Ekemue?"

"This is the way it is written in the language of higher dimensions. But in the language of this world, that would be a 'train station'."

"You know, it's actually EKiMaE[38]!"

This was on the same level as 'KWSK[39]' and 'WKTK[40]'!

That kind of higher dimension!

"Eh? Wait, you said, 'station'... Don't tell me you're talking about that incident last month?"

"Yes, I happened to witness Eita launch a Holy War (SAINT WAR) against a minion manipulated by the Evil Dragon (WYVERN). Thanks to Eita's AURA, the seal on my spirit was released, so I can now recover the memories of my past life."

Even though wild electric waves were flying all about, I had roughly grasped the approximate situation.

After all, since I also suffered from 'Eighth Grade Syndrome', I could understand! These so-called delusions have an especially influential nature. For example, when vampires became a popular trend in manga, the whole Japan was filled with deluded people who believed 'my true identity is a vampire'. Because people will continue to be receptive of anime, games, and real events; Thus, the number of new scenarios will only continue to increase.

In front of the station, I played the role of 'Holy Dragon Knight of Dawn' to save Chiwa. Akishino Himeka, who witnessed this scene, probably received my delusions and added her own fantasies to the scene. With that on my mind, the words 'bind ourselves together again' finally made sense.

I never imagined it would be the bonds of a 'past life'.

...When you say it like that, how's one supposed to think of that*?!*

Hime buried her little face into my chest.

"I will try my best to make Eita recover the memories of our past lives."

"Don't! That's nothing to try your best at!"

"No problem, as long as we fight together, we won't lose to the Evil Dragon Clan."

"Before that, my heart will definitely lose iiiiiiiiit."

At this moment, there was the sound of a door opening behind us.

A savior was coming!

At this point, I didn't care if it was a patrolling teacher or disciplinary committee member.

Just liberate me from this hell of electric waves hug-hug radiating around me[41]——

"Eeeeeei-kuuuuun~?"

But mayhem came.

Harusaki Chiwa-san.

Her wide eyes were bloodshot and her legs were open astride. The fried pork bread in her hands was crushed into paste.

—Yes, Chiwa was very angry!

"Hey, what are you doing on the roof? Who is that girl? Why are you hugging?"

"W-W-Wait, Chiwa! WAIT[42], Chiwa! Wait there for a moment!

After I stopped Chiwa from approaching, I whispered to Hime:

"Please, don't let that person know that we were lovers in our past lives."

"Why? I want to explain how we love each other."

"That's exactly what you can't say, or it'll be troublesome... No, because if anyone from this era finds out, it'll be disastrous! Try to use the ordinary language of this world, to, you know, say something *ordinary fitting* for this world!"

For the time being we'll pretend we know each other and then we'll think of ways fudge our way through!

"Why are your faces so close to each other?!"

Chiwa ran towards us, with her eyes teary and her heavy footsteps.

"Hey, who are you? What kind of person are you to Ei-kun? What's your relationship with him?"

"I'm Eita's..."

Do not *say it! Pleases* do not *say you were my girlfriend in a past life!*

"Ex-girlfriend."

Wuahh! That answer is even wooooooooooorse!

"E-E-Ex—E-E-E-Ex-girlfriend?!"

With the tone of tongue twister, Chiwa turned to me and demanded:

"Ei-kun, what's the meaning of this?"

"N-N-N-No, Chiwa! It's a trap! Yes, a trap!"

"You went out with this girl before? Without telling me? While you were being nice to me, behind my back, hiding it from me, you two...? I-I really can't believe iiiiiiiit!"

Chiwa grabbed me by the collar and shook. My head waved back and forth!

Someone save me! Please!

Then I heard the sound of the door opening——

"Ara, ara, indeed 'a flower in each hand', Eita-kun."

With wind blowing in her silver hair, Natsukawa Masuzu appeared.

Her eyes were surprisingly gentle.

She was filled with brimming love as she stared at me, who was presently hugged by Hime with Chiwa grabbing my collar.

"M-Masuzu, this is not, this is *not*..."

"Then, what *could* this be?"

Masuzu said as she tilted her head to the side:

"I just heard something in the lines of 'I think Ei-kun received a love letter!' from Harusaki-san, So I followed her and *just* arrived here, but I still don't understand what's going on."

Wuah! Did Chiwa figure out the letter at the shoe cupboard from this morning?

Chiwa temporarily let go of my neck and said:

"Listen to this, Natsukawa! Ei-kun used to go out this girl in the past!"

"Ara. Oh, *really*?"

"She said she was his ex-girlfriend! Did you know about this, Natsukawa?"

"No, this is my first time hearing it. This is very interesting."

Masuzu took a black notebook out of her uniform pocket and began writing notes.

"M-Masuzu? What are you writing?"

"You want to peek?"

paah! Masuzu opened the notebook and held up to my face.

She had record dense notes with meticulous handwriting.

Eita-kun let Harusaki Chiwa use the shower in his house.

Eita-kun forced me to wear a naked apron.

Eita-kun rejected my request for a kiss.

Eita-kun kept staring me with vulgar eyes as I wore my swimsuit.

Eita-kun had an ex-girlfriend. (NEW!)

Eita-kun concealed from me the fact that he had an ex-girlfriend. (NEW!)

Eita-kun had a foolish expression as his ex-girlfriend hugged him. (NEW!)

"Masuzu, this is..."

"Ma • su • zu?"

"No Masuzu-sama! What's the meaning of this notebook?"

My tongue was already tied in a knot.

As Masuzu brushed her hair up, she smiled and:

"Because I am very forgetful, I have to take notes."

ゴゴゴゴゴゴ•••

I didn't know where these JOJOJOJO-like sound effects were coming from.[43]

"Well, Ei-kun! Just give an honest confession!"

"You know, Eita-kun, if a human falls from a fourth story building, could he possibly remain unharmed? Don't you feel like giving it a *try*?"

"Ah! Wuaaah! Aaaaaahhhhhhhhhh."

I stepped backwards and Hime gently pulled at my sleeve.

"Eita, who are these two people?"

Before I could answer——

"I am Ei-kun's *childhood friend*, Harusaki Chiwa!"

"I'm Eita-kun's *girlfriend*, Natsukawa Masuzu."

Hime's eyebrows raised only a little bit and 'twitched'.

Then she pulled at my right arm.

"Eita, it's too noisy here. I want to go someplace away from these two people."

"Do you think I'm going to allow such a thing?!"

Chiwa grabbed my left arm and yanked. Hime lost her balance, fell onto the ground, and released her hands. Just like her delicate appearance, she was a frail girl.

"I don't know if you're his ex-girlfriend or something, but if you think you can monopolize Ei-kun, think again!"

"Yes, absolutely right, the only person who can monopolize Eita is his girlfriend, *me*."

"Right! Wait... Natsukawa, what are you talking about?!"

Masuzu suddenly began to fight with Chiwa and the situation already appeared like a

civil war.

With her rear end on the ground, Hime looked terrified as she stared at the two girls. This girl always had a deadpan expression and this was the first time some kind of expression appeared. But that was understandable, since these two were quite terrifying.

As a result, that pair of big watery eyes slowly began to produce tears——

"No..."

Hime whispered this sound, and it caused both Chiwa's and Masuzu's cheeks to stop.

"No! No, n-n-nooo! Eita is Hime's! Other girls can't touch him! The only person who can hug Eita close is Hime——!"

Hime kicked her hands and feet wildly like a spoiled child[44], and I could only stand and watch.

Chiwa was the same and even Masuzu was dumbstruck, their mouths simply open in a daze.

"Huph— Huph—", Hime's shoulder moved up and down with her breath and she glared at the two girls. It took an entire a minute before she regained her calm visage.

After she fully returned to her original poker face, Hime asserted seriously:

"What just happened… Just act like you didn't see anything"

[...] ...Impossible!

#7: Beautiful Angelic Maidens Mayhem

#7 美少女天使たちの修羅場

Lunch break the next day.

I was eating my bento with Kaoru as usual and asked him about Akishino Himeka.

"I know her. She's the daughter of the family that runs 'Akishino Inn[45]', right?

Just like a best friend might, he immediately answered. Even though Kaoru's lunch was only a tiny tomato salad, he was a very reliable person. I really wished that gluttonous Chihuahua would learn from him.

"'Akishino'——Is that the inn at the foot of the mountain in Hane no Yama? "

"Yes, they own a traditional inn founded in the old Edo era. Even though a lot of new mega hotels have been built recently, people say they're all worse than Akishino's by a good deal."

"Eh...? So she's actually the daughter of an illustrious family?"

I imagined Hime as a young attendant of the Inn, saying 'Irasshaimase' as she greeted guests… but her poker face probably made it difficult for her to receive guests, even if she looked good in a kimono.

"What class is she in?"

"First year, class 2."

"Whaa... She's in the class next door? But I didn't know our neighboring class had a girl like her."

Kaoru poked at his mini-tomatoes while he shrugged his shoulders and said:

"Even though this probably isn't a nice thing to say, but she isn't a very sociable person. She's always alone, as if she's afraid of others. She probably doesn't have any friends."

"Ah..."

It didn't matter whether she's like that because she was 'afraid of others' or simply 'quiet'. She likely came to that denpa gyun-gyun[46] style because she had to escape from an uncomfortable ordinary life.

"Why do you ask about Akashino-san?"

"Ah, well, in fact, yesterday after school, she spoke to me for a while."

"She spoke to you? Really?"

Kaoru spoke with round eyes.

"That's amazing, Eita. There's even some people in class 2 who have never heard the sound of her voice. What did she say?"

"Oh, uh, that… something about a game."

Of course I couldn't say that she approached me about wishful thoughts about her memories of love from her past life.

"I wonder what about Eita is she interested in?"

"How am I supposed to know? You might as well ask her."

"...That, um, Eita."

Kaoru leaned his face close and lowered the volume.

"Maybe I'm being too nosy, but you should probably try to stop her from becoming attracted towards you?"

"W-What are you talking about?!"

"You're already caught in the mayhem between Natsukawa-san and Chihuahua-chan, and if you added one person to that... You really might get stabbed[47] ."

"[...] ...Ha, haha."

How is that possible? I wanted to laugh, but could only force myself to chuckle weakly.

Because it was too late!

"What's wrong, Eita? You don't look so good."

"Aaahh, it's probably because I'm little tired from exams..."

Why is a shy girl infatuated with me?

How did the scuffle in front of the train station end up raising a flag? I really have no clue.

The day before it had been very difficult for me to pull away from Hime and having her going home, since she clung so close to me. When I returned to the clubroom afterwards, Masuzu and Chiwa reprimanded me severely. Even though I tried to explain that 'she mistook me as her boyfriend from her past life' they obviously did not believe me. By the time they accepted it, school was already long over and the teacher later scolded the three of us, 'How long do you intend to stay here'?! My girlfriend and childhood friend really were ridiculous.

...It's impossible that Hime will turn up after school today uninvited, right?

♦

—Of course.

It was the impossible.

"Eita, welcome back."

As soon as I opened the door of the club room, Hime quickly came and wrapped herself around my waist. Her body was as light as a feather and because she was too light, I almost dragged her as I walked.

"W-Why are you here?!"

"When I was searching for Eita around school, this modern person requested that we connect our lines."

Hime’s fingers pointed to Masuzu, who sat smiling while holding a teacup.

"In short, I invited her to tea, but she refused to say a word, so I honestly couldn’t do anything. And I obviously really wanted to learn about Eita-kun’s past life that I rarely hear about."

This girl who clearly said 'Why don't you play with me?' yesterday started to fake crying.

"So I continuously spoke to her even though she didn't respond. Right, for example, 'fragment of promise of victory', that sort of thing."

"What did you say?"

Fragment of promise of victory.

That was a part of the 'Eighth-Grade Notebook' where I vainly listed the background story of 'my past self'. For example, 'I am the last survivor of the Holy Dragon Race, and the prince of Planet Saint Dragon', or 'Secret technique, Destiny's Dark Black Flame', and so on... Ahh, it was brimming full with this kind of appalling 'naïve-ness'.

Basically, as Hime hears this, she will increasingly combine my 'delusions' with her own delusions——

"Masuzu, come here, I have something I want tell you."

Masuzu happily stood up and said:

"You want to show off in front of your ex-girlfriend how much we love each other? So characteristic of Eita-kun, cruel and unfeeling, but that part of you I really… kya♪."

"Some • thing • to • *tell*, it's merely about speaking, so just come over here!"

I was planning to go outside first, but Hime refused to let go of my shirt.

She attentively looked up to me like a child and said:

"Where is Eita going? I want to go too."

"Sorry, wait a little. Let Masuzu and me be alone for a little bit."

"...I understand, I will hold my position."

Hime dejectedly hung her shoulders, as she nodded adorably.

This girl, it's not like she is someone evil or something...

I left the clubroom and brought Masuzu to the end of the corridor where nobody was

around.

"Hey, what are you trying to do? Why did you bring her here? Why did you tell her those grave delusional things?"

Masuzu looked calm and said:

"It was nothing. I just thought that, as your current 'girlfriend', it would be nice to exchange notes with your 'ex-girlfriend'."

"That's why I said it before, she's not my ex-girlfriend, she—"

"Yes, she's called the 'Holy Dragon Princess of Dawn', right? I never expected she would so easily believe the delusion Eita-kun shouted so loudly in front of the station. Isn't it like a dream?"

If you say so, but this wasn't the kind of dream *I* wanted.

Suddenly, Masuzu spoke with a serious expression:

"I want Akishino-san to become a member of the 'Jien-Otsu'."

"...Are you honest about this?"

"If it's true that she was your ex-girlfriend, I would have dismembered Eita-kun into eight pieces[48] —but if she was your girlfriend from your past life, it will not disrupt our '(fake) boyfriend contract'. Of course I cannot let such a fun toy... Oops, I mean, such promising talent escape. "

It doesn't matter as long as it's interesting? That's really Masuzu's style.

At this point Chiwa walked towards us while carrying her bag.

"What are you doing in this kind of place? You're not going to the clubroom?"

I explained to her how we were thinking about letting Hime join the club and Chiwa immediately became angry.

"I'm against it! I resolutely oppose it!"

"Why?"

"Because that Akishino doesn't even want to become 'popular', right? She is only focused on Ei-kun and she even stuck to him while refusing to let go yesterday!"

"Harusaki-san, aren't you the same? You're only focused on Eita-kun as well, isn't that so?"

Chiwa's face gradually flushed red.

I thought she would fiercely protest, but I didn't expect—

Chiwa said: "[...] ...But that doesn't count, it's natural because I'm his childhood friend."

Strange?

You're not going to refute it? Chiwa?

Something like: 'Who would be interested in Ei-kun?!'

Or: 'I'm just practicing how to become popular, that's all!'

At least, she would have definitely replied like that not long ago...

—I'm getting off topic.

In short: We needed to confirm her intentions, so we returned to the clubroom.

I sat in the seat next to the window and Hime immediately scurried to my side. It was like she was a small animal. If Chiwa was a Chihuahua, then Hime was a hamster.

The veins on Chiwa's temples nearly burst as she spoke:

"Well. Err, Akishino-san."

"Call me Hime. I don't like it when people call me by my name from this life."

"I'll call you 'Himecchi[49] ', then. Is Himecchi interested in becoming popular?"

"Not in the least."

She flatly said.

"I—"

Hime hugged my arm and said:

"I don’t think any boy other than Eita is important."

"Whaa—...?!"

"'Popularity' is a vulgar concept that only interests you people from the present era. I hope you do not drag Eita and I into it."

Chiwa's mouth opened and shut again. It opened and shut again, as if she were speechless.

Masuzu coughed to clear her throat, and said:

"Okay, okay, Akishino-san."

"'Hime is fine."

"*Akishino*-san."

Masuzu, unrelentingly insisted on calling her that, looked at Hime and said:

"I cannot ignore the statement that you just made. You even called our activities 'vulgar'. People really have a lack of understanding, especially when they don’t realize people in this club are chosen soldiers to fight the Evil Dragon Clan."

"...What does that mean?"

Hime's eyes were flashing with light.

It seems like mentioning 'chosen to become a soldier' excited her self-esteem. Even though the background story was that complex, her character was actually very simple.

"Top-class warriors will certainly attract the opposite sex. They aren't merely strong, but they must also have intense charisma before they can be called a 'Holy Dragon Princess of Dawn', right?"

"...It does have some truth."

Hime stuck her nose in the air.

She seemed to really like Masuzu's added 'Popular Holy Dragon Princess of Dawn' background story.

Well, 'warriors' are indeed very cool.

Within their world in anime and manga they are usually very popular and there are many works where the main heroine soon nearly falls in love with the hero, there are also works which include harems.

"Well—"

Masuzu took out my very familiar eighth-grade notebook.

"This notebook is a token left by my 'first love', and it was also the diary of the first incarnation of the 'Holy Dragon Knight of Dawn'."

Masuzu just said something that made the background setting even more complex.

"The first incarnation what? Do you mean Eita is the second incarnation?"

"You could say you're both right and wrong. After all, the flesh is just a container for the soul. But since Eita already inherited 'Dawn' in his title, he is the second incarnation, but he is also the first incarnation. What's yours is mine. What's mine is still mine, so what is yours is mine, which basically comes from the logic that I am also you."

Hime vigorously nodded her head and said:

"It's very easy to understand."

"It's very —*difficult* to understand!"

Look, Chiwa's eyes have basically become dots!

Her ears are even venting steam! Ah, what should I do?

"'He' is a top-class warrior, so of course he is super popular with women. Let me explain some of this."

PAH! Masuzu flipped open the notebook.

"Huph! Again?!"

I've gradually grown accustomed to hearing my notebook read aloud.

After this month's mayhem, I had already given up.

'Let her do what she wants'! I probably had that kind of feeling.

"'Those who protect me , Vi Mai Angels'."

"Wait! Just waiiiiiiiiiiiiit!"

"Ah, what's wrong?"

Masuzu smiled at me as she asked.

It's the devil's smile!

"Listen to me, you two. This is an order by the President: Please restrain Eita-kun."

I was about to fly towards Masuzu, but my arms were pulled in opposite directions by Chiwa and Hime.

"Why do you only cooperate during these times?!"

"Huh? Because I am also interested in hearing about it."

"I also have the right to know holy words that the first incarnation of the 'Holy Dragon Knight of Dawn' left behind."

I struggled, but Masuzu began to read aloud in front of me.

'Those who protect me , Vi Mai Angels'

Today I will introduce the beauties who are around me.

Of course, the 'beautiful girls' part is just their cover.

In reality, They support me in my battle with the Evil Dragon Clan. They are the reliable Vi • Mai • Angels.

★ The first angel: Ayanami Asuka[50].

Element • Light.

A beauty in the same grade as me, aggressive and headstrong.

Catchphrase is: "Are you an idiot?"

Always has——

"Wuuauaaaaahhhh, Masuzu, what color is your blooooooooooood[51]?!"

I finally managed to throw off the two girls and sprang at Masuzu —but my stomach collided forcefully with the corner of the table.

While I rolled about the floor in pain, Masuzu continued to relentlessly read:

"Always acts tsuntsun, but, of course, in reality she likes me."

"Stopp it! Don't read that! Stopp iiiiiit!"

"C.V.: Hayashibara Yuko[52]."

"Stooop it! It's melting[53]! Stooop iiiit!"

HEEEE

Chiwa tilted her head, puzzled:

"What is a C.V.?"

"It's an abbreviation for character voice, which means seiyuu."

"Eh! They're seiyuu? Not angels?"

"In short, I think 'He' used his favorite seiyuu's voices to dub the Vi • Mai • Angels?"

"Ah?"

Chiwa rolled her eyes unfathomably.

No... It's not true, Chiwa.

But they do have a point.

But it wasn't like that...

"★ The second angel: Tsukino Rei. Element • Fire. She is a beautiful shrine maiden, afraid of germs. Her catchphrase is: 'I'll punish you!' Even though she hates men, but, of course, in reality she likes me. C.V.: Yotsuishi Michie.[54]"

"Are you going to read the whole thing?!"

Masuzu winked at me as if to say 'of course' and continued executing my death penalty.

★ The third angel: Daigouji Sakura.

Element • Water

She is a beauty who has lived near me ever since I was three; very energetic.

Catchphrase is: 'Funya~an~?'

She always jokes and says: 'Onii-chan, suki, suki!'

But, of course, in reality she likes me.

C.V.: Iwao Sakura.[55]

★ The fourth angel: Onodera Miko.

Element • Wind

A beauty older than me by two years, sexy and seductive.

Catchphrase is: 'Hold me!'

She always wears nearly obscene clothes to seduce me.

But, of course, in reality she likes me.

C.V.: Namiguchi Yuuko.[56]

★ The fifth angel: Kisagari Megumi

Element • Dark

As a beauty part of the library committee, she is very shy.

Catchphrase is: 'Um, this...'

Even though she is very shy, she only opens her heart to me.

But, of course, in reality she likes me.

C.V.: Koudama Riko.[57]

"Amazing —They all 'in reality she likes me', so he must have been very popular."

"He’s really worthy of having the brave title 'Dawn'."

I was extremely impressed by Chiwa and Hime’s reaction to my life crisis, as my body continued to unconsciously twitch.

"That's strange? Wasn't there supposed to be four angels? Why are there five?"

I'm sorry, Chiwa— twitch— I think I wrote too excitedly— twitch.

...Aah.

I think I see it...

Beauties with white Vi • Mai • Angels, laughing and giggling as they descend toward me.

Asuka, Rei, Sakura, Miko, Megumi.

I am finally going to the harem where you have been waiting for me—

"Eita-kun, please wake up."

With a slap in the face, I was pulled back into the real world.

Masuzu, Chiwa, and the Hime were all staring at my face with a worried look.

"If you're feeling unwell, do you need to go to the nurse's office?"

"Ei-kun, does your head hurt? I have medicine."

"I think you received a mental attack from the Wyverns. I opened a barrier, so there shouldn't be any problem now."

Although they expressed themselves differently with all kinds feelings, they were all worried about me with kind intentions.

"Y-You all..."

Emotionally moved, my body shook a little.

Right.

I'm not alone.

I could still go back to that place.

Nothing would make me happier than that!

Do you understand...?

Asuka and everyone else, I can come see you whenever I want—!

"Wait, Natsukawa! Why are you taking advantage of the situation and hugging Ei-kun?!"

"No, I just wanted to move him to the infirmary, that's all. Is that a problem?"

"My spell has broken. Since this is the case, I need to use a kissing ritual (INITIATION) to directly infuse 'mana' into him."

"You want to kiss what?! If that's the case, get out of my way!"

[...]

I'm sorry, Asuka.

I think I can't go to that place.

♦

At the same time as all of this commotion——

"I want to observe the club for a while."

Because Hime replied like that, the question of her joining the club was temporarily put aside.

"Okay, that's fine."

Masuzu said while smiling.

"For the first semester, we'll consider you a temporary member. If you are interested in coming to the club meetings, then feel free."

"I understand."

"Wait a minute."

Chiwa interrupted, looking upset and her mouth full of bread.

"Oh, Harusaki-san, was there something else?"

"Even if she's a temporary member, how can we just leave her alone? We really need to have her practice! She needs to undergo basic training for becoming popular!"

As a sports-type, she was really preoccupied with these kinds of small things.

"I see, but what specifically do you do for basic training?"

"It's not a lot. You just have to tilt your eyes up a hundred times like how you wave a sword, and then smile adorably one thousand times like you're practice violent stabs!"

"...Harusaki-san, do you practice like this?"

Faced with something beyond her imagination, Masuzu was completely awestruck.

"Well, since Harusaki-san said it —Let's give Akishino-san an independent assignment."

"Assignment?"

"Please write a poem about what kind of 'ideal' maiden you want to be and submit it to us before the end of next week."

When she finished speaking, she pulled a new notebook out of her bag and handed it to Hime. *Did she specifically go to the store to buy it for this? This girl is, like always, ridiculously* well-prepared.

"Hime, you don't have to force yourself. Don't let Masuzu's flowery words trick you."

"[...]"

Hime opened the white notebook and held her mechanical pencil stiffly. Because she

didn’t have any expressions, I had no idea what she was thinking. It looked like she was seriously considering it, but she also looked as if she were simply in a daze.

Was Hime seriously considering joining 'Jien-Otsu'?

#8: Toast Attack is Mayhem

#8 食パンあたっく！で修羅場

The next day first class was physical education.

It was neither swim class nor a mixed-gender class. We were playing basketball in the gym —a game of knockout. The person of each group who made their ball in second was considered the loser and then a different group would go up and play.

Since I already lost, I had some free time, so I leaned against the wall near the entrance and sat down.

I unconsciously looked outside through the open door —the girls of class 2 were on the field doing group-stretching. They were split up into pairs. One. Two. Three. They turned and stretched their bodies. When I came back to my senses, I noticed that all the boys around me were watching the scene with longing eyes. *Ah, that's right.* We did it unconsciously. There wasn't anything we could do about it.

At this moment— I noticed a doll left out of the circle of stretching girls, as she stood alone in the shade of a tree.

It was Hime.

"She couldn't find a partner?"

But in this kind of situation, wouldn't the physical education teacher form a pair with you?

I looked again at the circle they were forming and I spotted the teacher wearing a red sports jersey stretching with another girl already.

In other words, there were already enough girls to form pairs with everyone already.

Even so, Hime was left out? —Did that mean her existence was completely forgotten?

Not only students, but also even the teacher forgot her?

"Hmmm..."

How was that possible?

Isolated in the shade of a tree, Hime still wore a poker face. Was she lamenting the situation? Or was she indifferent? It was difficult to comprehend from her expression.

Maybe she wanted to be alone, or maybe her heart was trapped with no way out.

At these times, Chiwa would probably have said: 'Why are you standing blankly? Come on, let's go—' And then drag Hime away.

But me——

"Hey, sensei!"

I shouted to our physical education teacher who was currently acting as referee.

"Hmm? Mr. 'Kidou[58]', what's wrong?"

"[...]"

Mr. Popular Kido...

Have some rumors about me spread even amongst the teachers?

I'll temporarily ignore it for now.

"It's about the girls who are stretching on the field over there."

"Oh, there's a girl you like there? If you do, you want to mingle with them?"

"Gahahaha!", he released a great laugh worthy of his tall stature.

Again, I'll ignore it.

"Look, over there. One of the girls seem left out."

"Eh? Where?"

I pointed to the shade of a tree and the physical education teacher noticed her.

"Oh, she is left out."

"I think class 2's teacher hasn't noticed yet."

"Right! I'll go say something."

I replaced the teacher as referee and he immediately ran to the field. He really was a

good teacher. Before at the swimming pool, he also saved Yamamoto-kun from the football club and Masuzu.

The teacher from class two finally noticed Hime and ran to the shade while apologizing: "S-Sorry!"

So it had been resolved.

The teacher pulled Hime with her hand and brought her into the circle of girls.

Due to the distance it wasn't possible to see clearly —but from the side, her eyes seemed to gleam with tears.

"...Tche!"

This was the kind of time one ought to have 'no need for sympathy, because warriors are always alone'.

And even she insisted that she was an active duty warrior.

Yet, why do you have to look so happy?

...Isn't that cute?

♦

A day passed uneventfully. After school.

When I arrived at the club room, Hime was already there writing something. Masuzu and Chiwa said they would be late, so I thought I would be the first to arrive.

"Yo, Hime, you are extremely early."

"After classes ended, I immediately leaped into space, since I wanted to see Eita as soon as possible."

"...R-Really?"

As soon as I sat down on the seat opposite to her's, Hime immediately moved into the chair next to mine. Even though we've known each other for a few days, she already seemed very intimate. If she could be like this with her classmates, then everything would be all right.

"Was my relationship with you in our past life that good?"

"Certainly. We had five children."

"Huh? We were married?"

Hime continued to wear a poker face as she shook her head and said:

"Because the Dimensional Logic System disapproved of Eita's low annual income, you didn't register our household."

"This setting is too pitiful, isn't it?"

Normally, you would make your annual income one hundred million, or something like that!

To say I was a citizen with low income, yet had five children! That's just trash!

"It's not a setting, it's our past life."

Her Royal Highness Hime said very coldly. Living in the past life must have been very difficult.

"What is this 'Dimensional Logic System'? Your parents?"

"I deny this. This body exists to monitor the living beings on this planet from the Milky Way, with the objective to increase evolution. I was appointed to one of its subunits, which had the official name, 'Adjustment of Earthly Biological Unit for the Adjustment of Earthly Biological Matrixes'."

"I don't quite understand, but didn't you say 'Adjustment of Earthy Biological' twice?"

"—!"

Hime flashed a 'darn!' expression for an instant.

But it quickly changed back into a poker face and she said:

"This body exists to monitor the living beings on this planet from the Milky Way, with the objective to increase evolution..."

"We're starting again at the beginning?"

We should just leave this part out.

I don't have time, okay?!

Because I was in a bad mood, I went and pinched Hime's face.

Soft! Extraordinarily flexible!

"R-Retret from Braight Monk Moundo Thing Zonne, and take advantague of the bare window!"

Even so, she still finished speaking.

It made me admire that perseverance of such strong eighth-grade syndrome.

"Oh, what were you writing before?"

"The subject that the president assigned yesterday."

"Ah —any progress?"

Hime rubbed her face as she vigorously shook his head.

"I was just applying to the Higher Dimensional Logic System to re-evaluate the difficulty of this mission from A to S."

"Meaning, making progress has been difficult for you?"

"It was a powerful enemy that exceeded my expectations."

Maybe that was the case. After all 'deciding what kind of maiden you want to be' is a bit abstract.

"You don't need to make it complicated. Just write about something you want to do, or something you feel is interesting. If you just write like that, you'll be fine."

"...I will do some research."

At this time the door opened, Masuzu and Chiwa walked into the clubroom. It was quite strange that these two were together.

After confirming the presence of Hime's figure, Masuzu smiled and said:

"How about it, Harusaki-san? Akishino-san did come today."

"I-I wasn't worried!"

It seemed like they had been in a discussion about whether Hime would come today.

"That comes from the one that said things such as 'weren't you a little harsh with what you said yesterday?'"

"I just said I wasn't!"

After putting her bag in the corner of the room on two large Japanese-style tatami mats, Masuzu sat down as Chiwa stood in front of the whiteboard… Normally, it was the other way around.

"For today's extracurricular activities, I heard that Harusaki-san already had something planned."

"Eh, Chiwa?"

"This is, um, Ei-kun, a test for the temporary member."

Chiwa looked at Hime, gave a 'humph'-snort with her nose, and said:

"Let me warn you first, I'm very strict, so are you mentally prepared?"

"As long as I'm with Eita, there won't be a problem."

Hime hugged me again.

The muscles on Chiwa's face became rigid.

"T-Today, using Ei-kun as a partner, we will have club activities with the subject being..."

Chiwa wrote several large words on the whiteboard:

Eating Toast'-Attack to Become Popular! Fight!'

"What is 'Eating Toast'-Attack?"

When I raised this inevitable question, Chiwa gave an amazed look, straightened her chest and said:

"While dangling toast on your mouth, surprise!"

"Ah?"

"While eating toast, attack the boy that you like! Fight!"

"[...]"

My childhood seems to be be beyond help…

"But, haven't you already tried this in the past?"

Before 'Jien-Otsu' was established, Masuzu had Chiwa do 'Fighting is Popular' schemes which had certain peculiar 'results'. Most of the things we did were on par with this proposal.

"Back then, I just ran to school while dangling toast in my mouth, but that's not enough. When I was re-reading shoujo manga a few days ago, I realized that if one does not collide with anyone, there's no opportunity to have an encounter!"

Chiwa wrote on the whiteboard below 'Toast-Attack to Become Popular! Fight!'.

Step 1: While dangling toast in the mouth, say: 'Ah— I'm late! I'm late—!' while running on the street.

Step 2: Hit a handsome guy.

Step 3: 'I'm so sorry! I'm really clumsy, giggle~'

Step 4: 'What an interesting girl... What's your name?'

Step 5: Become popular!

"[...]"

I want to say this sentence that I haven't said in a long time.

This is exactly —*exactly* like 'Jien-Otsu'!

"So, the key point is the 'Colliding Method'."

Masuzu proposed a suggestion that suited her position as president.

"So we're using a 'Colliding Method' to display a beautiful encounter? This would probably be very challenging without a considerable amount of practice."

"Therefore, Ei-kun, can we count with you as the the 'Colliding person'?"

"Eh, so it was this kind of assignment..."

We left the clubroom, and went to the neighboring building near the science preparation room and audiovisual classroom, also known as the 'Practice Floor' building. Even though it was a bit noisy here, we would not disturb the other culture clubs, so we could practice all we like.

Dangling toast...

Hit the handsome guy...

...Practice.

It was so bad, I couldn't even cry!

Depending on the result of rock-paper-scissors, either Chiwa, Masuzu, or Hime would hit me in order.

For the toast dangling from the mouth, they used sweet bread that Chiwa stocked up on

as a substitute, since the 'cooperative store doesn't sell toast and it would be too much trouble to go to the convenience store'. Somehow, this sounds wrong from even before the start.

"Ei-kun, I going nooow——"

Chiwa moved about fifteen meters away, next to the stairs, as she waved her hands dramatically.

"Please go easy on me, Chiwa."

"To put all of my resolution on this, right[59]—?"

"Please go easy on meeeeeeee!"

Regardless, she went off without any reservation!

With her mouth dangling jam-covered bread, Chiwa cried 'I'm late! I'm late—!' while running towards me.

Frightened out of my wits, I turned the opposite way.

Even though we arranged to have the collision in front of the science room, Chiwa soon ran past where we planned, since she was running too fast.

"Oi, wait, Ei-kun! Why are you running?!"

"Of course I would flee!"

If I were hit by her with that kind of momentum, before falling into love I would be thrown into coma!

I ran with all my strength, but soon ran into the southern end of the school building.

But Chiwa still did not slow down on her momentum in the least.

I could probably dodge out of the way just before she hit me —but if I did, Chiwa would hit the wall!

"Damn, come at me theeeeen!"

I prepared myself mentally and opened my arms. I used my entire body to catch the Chiwa who jumped at me while crying 'Huhahu—♪'. Because of the ferocious momentum, the two of us immediately rolled into the ground.

I didn't know why her eyes were watery, but she hugged me tightly.

"E-Ei-kun!"

"W-What?!"

"I knew you would definitely catch me!"

"...Well——"

This somehow seems like a scene used in the first episode of a romantic comedy, however, for some reason I can already see the ending.

I can't understand this at all...

"Ah, somehow I'm supposed to play the part of the cool guy on his way to school?"

"Ah, right, I forgot."

"Well!", Chiwa hurriedly prepared herself.

"I'm sorry, I'm so clumsy! Kunkun[60]."

Kunkun.

Chiwa's nose was pressed against my chest… What was this girl thinking?

Anyways, I have to say the lines:

"S-So cute —You, what's your name—"

"Kunkun. Kunkun~"

Chiwa made noises like a puppy as she casually rubbed me with her nose.

"Oi— You, what's your name?!"

"Kun, Ei-kun! Kun..."

That was Chihuahua for you.

The bread that was dangling from her mouth was already in her stomach.

—Uh, what kind of club activity was this?

"Chihuahua-san please leave. Chihuahua-san please leave."

Masuzu used a broom to whack and smack Chiwa on the back.

"Malicious virus invading Eita detected, delete, delete, delete, delete, delete, delete, delete, delete, delete, delete."

With her normal mechanical sound mixed with resentment, Hime desperately pulled at Chiwa's uniform.

Chiwa finally stood up, tapped herself on the head as she stuck out her tongue and said:

"I'm sorry! I'm so clumsy, *tehe~*"

—Thus, the circle comes to a close.

Chiwa used a towel to wipe her sweat as she smiled, and said:

"How was it? Ei-kun?"

"What?"

"Do you feel light-headed?"

"...Well."

That's because my head hit something due to the force of the impact!

"Yeees♪ I successfully became popular!"

Chiwa happily jumped and bounced, but the truth was I couldn't say anything.

"How about that, Natsukawa? My battle tactics aren't bad, right? You should show a little more respect, right? Otherwise you can kneel to me, eh?"

Somehow, Chihuahua-san seemed to be getting carried away.

Masuzu gave a 'fuh' and shrugged:

"Well, that's about *all* you can do after using all your effort."

"What? Are you saying you can do even better?"

"Actions speak louder than words, and as president I will demonstrate this to you."

Then it was Masuzu's turn.

Masuzu came to my side as she opened a package of red bean bread:

"Eita-kun, please don't be too harsh on me."

"Aah, I request the same."

Masuzu lowered her voice, and brought her lips close to my ear:

"Because *I* forgot about it today."

"Heh?"

When I gave her that response, Masuzu only gave me a flirtatious look.

"Not wearing *it*, that's the case."

——*!?*

Not wearing it*?*

What?

A-Aaaah, The knee socks, right?

I looked at Masuzu as she walked back towards the starting position.

...Naturally, she was *wearing knee socks.*

Then, the 'not wearing it'—

"Anyway, I'm starting——"

"Wait a moment! Youuuu!"

I cried at Masuzu who waved at me next to the stairs, but it was too late.

She started running as the bread dangled from her mouth, 'Hihohu, Hihohu[61]'!

"Are? You? Comming? Any? Way? Er— I said wait! Waaaaait!"

With my mind in confusion, I also began running.

If Masuzu was 'not wearing it', then what would happen?

She would collide into me?

We would fall down?

Her skirt might lift off?

If that happened, you would see Masuzu's very important 'girl's'—

"*I'm a little late*——♪!"

"Wuaaaaaaaaaaah! Masuzu, doooooon't!"

I used my entire body to catch Masuzu who was rushing at me!

Because of the momentum's force we rolled along the floor!

During that time, like a matter of life or death, I grabbed the edge of her skirt that nearly lifted up! I used all that I had!

We continued to stumble —rolled just like that, until our backs hit the wall and we finally stopped.

'Girl's important parts' —no problem.

Thanks to the fact that I was tightly holding onto her skirt, it was not revealed!

G-G-Great...!

Masuzu held me as she whispered:

"Please forgive me, somehow, I'm a little clumsy, *tehe*!"

"There's a limit to how clumsy you can be!"

Such as forgetting to wear that kind of thing.

Don't forget to wear thaaaaaaat!

"Let me say something first, Eita-kun."

"Ah?"

"That bit from before, was a little *lie*♪."

"Aah?!"

Masuzu stuck out her tongue.

"Really, how could I *possibly* be forgetting to wear it? Again and again, this little Eita-kun; Just how far are you going to take those hopes of me 'not wearing it'. That's just so extremely perverted."

"Y-You!"

"If you doubt me, want to take a look? Here..."

"Wuahh, don't! Don't lift it!"

Chiwa and Hime came to our side, as we hugged each other on the ground still arguing with each other.

"It already ended, right? How long do you intend to stick there until, Natsukawaaaa?!"

"Evil spirt TISN[62], evil spirits TISN, evil spirits TISN—"

With that, the two of them pulled Masuzu away. *Saved! Transdimensional language*

seems quite reliable today!

"How was that? Harusaki-san?"

Masuzu brushed away the dust on her skirt, smiled and said:

"Eita-kun rushed towards *me* to hug me tightly, unlike that time with you when he *ran away*."

Chiwa gave a 'Uuuuu!' sound.

"This is because my colliding technique is quite developed. Even though we both performed the same toast attack, our 'skill levels' as maidens are so far apart, that such a large difference in the result can't be helped."

"H-H-How Frustrating—!"

No...

Earlier I was just protecting her skit.

But somehow I suppose that it shows why Masuzu's skill were greater than Chiwa's?

Finally, it was Hime's turn.

…She was the one I was the most anxious about.

It wasn't the same kind of 'anxiety' that I had for Chiwa or Masuzu. I was mostly worried about her physical strength.

Thinking back to the rooftop scene, she gives the impression that she's practically too weak to stand up against the wind.

"Hey, Hime, will you really be alright? Don't overdo it, okay?"

"No problem, I'll just hug Eita tightly."

"[...]"

Somehow, hasn't the goal completely changed?

But looking at her sparkling eyes, as Hime eagerly and excessively waved her arms, I couldn't bear to ask her to stop it.

Now, what I should do is just catch her, without letting her get hurt.

At the starting position, Hime assumed an 'absurd eagle pose'.

"With 'Holy Dragon Princess of Dawn' as my name, I will lead this campaign to expel the A-Rank deity Barbarossa, with the souls of heaven and earth everywhere——"

"You can leave out the eighth-grade-like opening prologue."

Hime momentarily pouted with 'humph', but immediately reverted to her deadpan expression and began munching on her red bean bread.

"Himecchi —You don't actually have to eat the bread."

"Yeah, it's fine if you just dangle it from your mouth."

"Undierstuud."

As per Chiwa and Masuzu's words, Hime used her small mouth to hold her half-eaten red bean bread.

She started running.

...Very slowly.

Even though Masuzu ran fairly slow, Hime was even slower. Her athletic ability seemed to be quite low.

Though, if this is the case, she'll be very easy to catch. But just when I thought that ——

"Mu, Gu, Fu!"

Hime suddenly grimaced and stopped.

She painfully clutched her chest and fell to her knees.

I ran over to her.

"Hey, what's wrong, Hime? Are you okay?"

"Fuanfua..."

"Heh?"

Hime's face looked pale and she pointed at her own throat.

"Fuanfua, Fuahama."

"[...]"

She seems to have choked on the bread.

Hime twitched like a fish stranded on land, trembling and shaking.

Aaah, certainly not good. This fellow surely won't reach popularity...

—But now's not the time to say that!

"Chiwa! Water! Quickly bring water from the clubroom!"

"W-Will do!"

"No, won't it be faster to scoop water from the science room?"

Maybe another club informed them, but a large group of disciplinary committee members ran over from the other set of stairs. Even from a distance, you could tell that their faces were flushed and extremely angry.

Apparently, we exceeded the 'slightly' part of 'being slightly loud won't be a problem'.

...Oh dear.

I felt as if our club was one step closer to disbanding.

♦

Masuzu and Chiwa were taken away by the furiously enraged disciplinary committee members.

Presently, they were probably being severely reprimanded in the committee headquarters, but I knew them well, and those two girls definitely would not sincerely reflect on their actions from just this little incident. While receiving their scolding, they would definitely think in their hearts: 'It's that idiot Natsukawa's fault!', 'It's that brawns-over-brains Chihuahua-san's fault!'. Somehow I could already hear the inner voice of their hearts.

As for me, I was responsible for Hime who currently laid on a Japanese-style tatami mat in the clubroom (and thus saved from being taken away by inevitable fate[63]). Even though the bread was very quickly taken out of her choking throat, we were taking extra precautions and letting her rest.

"Is it serious, Hime? Do you need to go to the health center?"

"No need to."

Even though she says that, Hime's face still looks a little pale, so letting her lie down will probably make her feel better.

"You don't need to force yourself to participate in club activities, right? You don't need to listen to what those two say."

"I..."

Hime looked up to me, who sat next to her pillow and said:

"Is it not all right for me to stay by your side, Eita?"

"...Well, it's not like it's 'not all right'..."

This was kind of hard to explain.

Even though I was anti-love, when such a cute girl said that kind of thing, it would be a lie to say I wasn't even a little happy.

But, the person who Hime liked was not 'me' as I am right 'now', but rather 'me' in the Golden Age of my Eighth-Grade Syndrome. This was the same as the time when Chiwa had said the 'He' from the 'notebook' was 'very cool'.

So I could not accept her love so easily.

"...Hey, why do you like me?"

"Why, is it?"

"Even though I was your boyfriend in your past life, that doesn't mean I have to be your boyfriend in this life?"

Would Hime be disillusioned by me?

If she saw me ordered around by Chiwa and Masuzu, as they climbed on my head, wouldn't she think 'my delusion and reality aren't the same'. That would be a strong slap from reality.

Hime sat silently for a while and then said:

"Before I entered Hanenoyama Prefectural High School, I once held very small expectations."

"Expectations?"

"A new world."

Hime's mechanical voice wavered slightly.

"I thought that entering this 'High School' system would open a new world, albeit *small*, but I still mustered that hope."

"...Then, how about it?"

"There was no change *at all*."

Hime's voice returned to its mechanical tone.

"Other than the name change from middle school to high school, there was no other change at all. The gray-colored everyday life, the gray-colored crowd, the gray-

colored time, and my own gray-colored self—everything was gray, and it continuously accumulated into this gray snowflake world."

"But...", Hime grabbed my sleeve and said:

"Eita is different. At EKME point, you alone shined in the gray-colored landscape, as you battled to protect a lady. Your figure was unshakable even as you were hurt——"

Hime's poker face crumbled, revealing her ashamed self.

"It was really cool."

"[...]"

Ahh.

How could I react?

I felt very sorry for misleading her.

If I were to draw an analogy, it was like the mood from someone praising a 'cat' painting and saying 'it's a cute dog'!

Even so, I felt a little happy.

...I really am so immature.

"But, I'm not the 'Holy Dragon Knight of Dawn' anymore. I graduated from that kind of thing in middle school."

"Graduated? I don't understand what you mean."

"I mean, I'm no longer part of the Holy Dragon race, and I'm not a prince from the Holy Dragon Star. I'm just an everyday human."

"No. Bonds from a past life can't be cut apart, even by magic swords."

"No, that's why——"

Hime immediately grasped my hand.

"*Believe*."

[...] [...]

"Eita is a valiant warrior, braver than anyone else and you’re someone who can cleave this gray world apart —as long as Eita is willing to believe it."

Hime looked at the 'assignment' notebook on the table.

"Then maybe, I think I'll be able to have some courage."

#9: The Gray World Split Apart is Mayhem

After a few days, it was Sunday afternoon.

Although it was a rare day off school, we in「Jien-Otsu」were ordered to the clean the school's swimming pool, which is otherwise known as punishment by labor. Exposed to the intense sunlight during the height of summer, we brushed the deck and brushed the pool drained of water; this bitterness was enough to make me want to curse all the world's living things.

"Why does a swimming pool without water exist in this world? We obviously don't need it."

Chiwa rested her chin against the handle of her brush, muttering nonsense to herself.

"Even swimming pools with water have no reason to exist in this world."

Masuzu indifferently moved her brush.

The two of them wore their gym clothes, and because of their sweat it stuck to their skin… and as a result the outline of their underwear was visible. It made me unsure where to look.

Incidentally, we did not ask Hime to come. If she got heatstroke working this hot weather, that would be bad.

"Ah --- Do you mean, Natsukawa is useless?"

"You're quite rude. I can swim."

"But before you almost drowned, right? How can you drown at a depth where your feet can touch the bottom of the pool? Why don't you tell me the details?"

Having identified her enemy's weakness, Chihuahua-san drew closer to Masuzu, unable to contain her joy, but ---

"I refuse. To compensate, should I describe to you the flavor of Eita-kun's lips?"

Chiwa was wounded by the response, and the corner of her mouth trembled for a moment.

Thousand and was sharply riposte, mouth shaking a bit.

Then, for reasons I didn't understand, she stared at me and said,

"Ei-kun, you're about to drown! I'll give you artificial respiration to eliminate the memory of this bitch!"

"Wouldn't it be better if Harusaki drowned? That way, I'll give you artificial respiration, so that way you can have an indirect kiss with Eita-kun. You'd be happy, right?"

--- They were really at their wits' end.

I tried to clean far away from the sparks and flames shooting from the two of them. If I were caught in it, it would be unbearable. But even though Masuzu said that she'd 「forget about the artificial respiration business」, I didn't understand why she let herself be provoked by Chiwa.

After we cleared the bottom of the pool of filth, a black limousine pulled into the parking lot as we sprinkled the side of the pool with a hose.

Just as I was thinking that I had seen that somewhere before ---

"Hi --- Nii-san ♪"

Natsukawa Mana.

Masuzu's little sister shook her blond hair and got off the limousine. Her bodyguard dressed in black also got off from the driver's seat, and followed from the side.

".....You again?"

I firmly stared at her from the pool deck, very much wanting to spray her with the water hose. Because this girl kissed me and caused so much trouble for me.

Mana condescendingly returned the stare,

"So it looks you made up with Suzu? So boring, especially after all my trouble to start some chaos."

"Mana, what are you doing here?"

Masuzu spoke, with her face stiff and body frozen next to me.

"This is my school, and I don't want you to take one step in here."

"Such a rude greeting, even though I particularly came here to apologize."

"Apologize?"

As Masuzu and I tilted our heads, puzzled, Chiwa finally returned from putting away the deck brushes.

"That's weird. Ei-kun, who is that girl?"

At that moment, Mana gave out a「Wahh- ♪」

"Is this girl Harusaki Chihuahua? Huh --- she's quite cute."

This girl even knows about Chiwa?

When she said she even knew「the headmaster of Suzu's school」, she wasn't lying? Perhaps she even found out that we would be at the swimming pool today through that means.

"So, Nii-san must be really popular, with this girl in one arm while holding Suzu in the other---"

Chiwa stared at her intently, feeling quite uncomfortable.

Masuzu spoke in an irritable voice,

"Get to the point. What are you apologizing about?"

"Ah, well ....."

Mana deliberately clapped her hands together as if pretending to beg forgiveness from Masuzu:

"You know that time I said I'd take care of things with Dad? It was no good. ♪ Dad got extremely angry, and I couldn't do anything about it."

Masuzu's expression visibly froze.

"He wants you to go home right now, and he doesn't want you to wait until the end of the semester. If you don't, he said he'd even go directly to your apartment and drag you back."

"No!"

Unexpectedly, Masuzu cried out in an emotional voice.

"My apartment is the only thing I don't want him to touch! I absolutely don't want that person to come!"

"If that's the case, you can only listen obediently, right?"

A triumphant smile emerged on Mana's face.

"I'll arrange your luggage and so forth, so Suzu-chan can just go home. If you don't leave by tomorrow or the day after..... well I can't say for sure what will happen, hm?"

Masuzu did not respond.

Masuzu was sweating so much it seemed like a lie, and she shivered slightly.

"Nii-san, why don't you use this to throw a goodbye party for Suzu?"

Mana took a purse from the man dressed in black, and grabbed a ten thousand yen banknote and stuffed it inside the fence of the swimming pool. Even if she was a stupid middle school student, she was rich.

"I don't want it, take it back."

"Really? It's better to turn down gifts of money. Is that how your aunt raised you?"

".....Why do you even know about that?"

"Haven't I said it already? I have investigated. Everything."

Mana tored apart the ten thousand yen bill into shreds, and let it be scattered by the wind.

The man wearing black opened the door, and Mana got into the limousine.

"So, to each of you young maidens in the club, farewell---"

Mana waved her hands like a naïve child and left.

.....Damn, she really did what she wanted.

Chiwa watched the taillights of the limousine and said,

"What?! That girl is so arrogant! Does Natsukawa know her?"

"That girl is a Masuzu's little sister."

"S-sister? Really? But their hair color isn't the same!"

Although I was also curious about this, I didn't want to ask Masuzu, so I could only ignore it. My best guess is that they didn't share the same mother or father, and perhaps they had a very complicated family.

Even at this point Masuzu still had her head bent down, wordless.

"What are you going to do, Masuzu?"

".....I can only go back. Go back home."

"Ah, there's nothing you can do about it, right? Since your father even said it to that extent… at least it's almost summer vacation."

Chiwa probably still did not understand the situation.

She thought that「go home」meant「visiting relatives」.

I was afraid that ---

"Where is Natsukawa's family from? Kanto? Northeast? It can't be Hokkaido?"

"From Sweden."

"....."

Chiwa was stunned.

"I'm afraid I might never come back to Japan."

"Really?"

Masuzu did not meet my eyes, as she nodded slightly.

Then, she suddenly spoke out in a refreshed voice,

"Ah --- it looks like my relationship with Eita-kun will end here. I can't try to maintain a long-distance relationship while separated by an ocean. Although our time together was short, I was very happy to be together with you."

"....."

Only Chiwa was speechless. As for me, this was not so surprising.

Because, after all, I was fake.

If she dropped out of school, the「boyfriend contract」didn't make any sense.

For me, it was pretty much my wish fulfilled. Without a「girlfriend」, I would be able to return to my previous life. This excessive mayhem was finally coming to an end.

But.....

"Do you think this is okay?"

"After all, I'm not the kind of person to get sentimental about the past. Since I'm going to leave this school, I don't intend to prolong my relationship with you."

Masuzu's cold indifference was astonishing.

"Eita-kun, dump me right now."

"....."

"Heh, I knew it would be impossible for Eita-kun."

Masuzu exposed a slightly lonely smile, and said,

"Then let me do it..... I'm tired of you, I hate you, and I don't even want to see your face. I will return you to your childhood friend, and ask both of you to be happy. When the two of you have your wedding --- don't bother looking for me, I don't care."

"Ei-kun was mine in the first place."

Chiwa, who had been silent the entire time, whispered resolutely.

"I don't remember when I gave him to you. From the beginning, I didn't intend to invite you to the wedding."

This was beginning to turn quite extraordinary, but now was not the time to tsukkomi.

Chiwa glared at Masuzu and said,

"Why are you giving up so easily? What did you just tell me? Weren't you going to tell me what Ei-kun's l-l-l-l-lips tasted like? Even if it was just artificial respiration, you had such an arrogant expression. You aren't attached to the past? Who do you think you are? It's really pitiful for Ei-kun! More importantly, it's pitiful to me! Just because you showed up, I..."

I patted the speechless Chiwa on the back.

"Masuzu, I think you misunderstood."

"......Misunderstood what?"

"When I asked,「Do you think this is okay?」I wasn't talking about myself. I was talking about the young maiden's club, and Hime's business."

Masuzu's icy expression was obviously shaken.

"The person who proposed to let Hime join the club was you, right? The person who gave her the assignment was also you, and she's taking it very seriously. Even though she's surrounded by electric waves, is extremely shy, and lacks a model for communication skills, she's taking a new step out despite her worries to attempt「club activities」. And you, who suggested this is going to run away?"

"I can't do anything about it."

Masuzu just said that one phrase.

"That man will stop at nothing to achieve what he wants. If I don't go back, I don't know what means he'll use, perhaps even hurt you all. Mana said it already. He already knows about my situation at school here."

When Masuzu said「that man」, she probably meant her father.

"Then what?"

"There is no,「then what」, so ---"

"Then what do you want?"

Masuzu distinctly gasped.

"What do you want? Natsukawa Masuzu, do you want to stay here? Or do you not want to stay?"

".....I don't have the power to choose."

"You bastard!"

I didn't ask you this!

I don't want to hear you say that kind of thing.

Do you want to stay here, or do you not want to stay? That's all I asked.

If you say,「I want to stay here」, then.....

I will… we will---

"Ei-kun, let's go?"

Chiwa ignored Masuzu with her head down, and pulled on my arm.

"Do not worry about her, okay? Hey! Today I want to eat a hamburger steak. Make it for me, Ei-kun. We can go shopping at「Wonder」[64] and then go back?"

I reluctantly nodded.

I grabbed my bag hanging on the wall, and walked out with Chiwa.

While I was leaving the pool, I only looked back once.

As the sunlight began to tinge orange, it illuminated Masuzu's pale profile.

"Hey, Masuzu!"

I shouted to her.

"E-even if you go back, at least collect Hime's assignment! Can you do that at the very least? Hey, Masuzu---"

"Hey, Ei-kun, let's go!"

Chiwa kept pulling my hand away.

Masuzu.

My「girlfriend」was getting farther and farther away from me.

♦

I was eating dinner with Chiwa.

With a huge hamburger steak as the main dish, Chiwa refilled her big bowl of rice three times. Since she normally only eats three small bowls of rice, she was approaching nearly twice her usual. Although she must have been hungry from cleaning the pool, this amount of food was simply too frightening.

"I'm so angry --- angry, angry! Rawr!"

Chiwa whined while she crunched and snapped at a mixed carrot dish. And what was the meaning of that rawr? It wasn't cute at all.

"Why are you so angry?"

"What? --- Ei-kun isn't angry? Natsukawa's attitude is really unbelievable! Even if her parents ordered it, why is she suddenly breaking up?! Really! Really!"

She turned into a cow again, [65] which definitely was not cute.

"No, for me, it's not that I'm angry....."

It's a lonely feeling.

If Masuzu were upset or resisted it all, then I would try to do something.

But since she gave up, it made me feel lonely.

It felt like I was rejected.

Our relationship as「Fake Lovers」only went to that degree.

"I'm more surprised that you're angry."

"Huh? Why?"

"Because your natural predator Masuzu is going to disappear. I thought you would definitely be happy."

Chiwa drank her barley tea in one gulp, and slammed the drinking glass on the table.

"You, Ei-kun. You know my personality."

"Personality?"

"If I don't have a rival, I can't get fired up! That's because my goal is to become someone more popular than Natsukawa! If she slips away after beating me, that's what I can't accept."

".....I see."

Right.

Chiwa was that kind of straightforward person.

"Even though I hate Natsukawa, I still like our「Young Maidens Club」. After all this trouble, she leaves just when we're about to get more members. She's really too

irresponsible, too headstrong!"

"Aren't you against Hime joining the club?"

".....I used to be against it."

Chiwa's momentum suddenly disappeared, and she looked down.

"Because that girl always sticks to Ei-kun's side, and said stuff like「it's vulgar to be popular」. If her only goal is Ei-kun, I originally did not want her to join our club, but....."

Chiwa took out her cellphone from her pocket, and placed the screen in front of me.

"Woo, wuahh!"

I couldn't help but let out a sound.

Displayed on the screen is "guh!" the face of Hime rolling her eyes.

Bloodshot eyes.

Saliva dribbled from the corner of her mouth.

I think this must have been a mental breakdown.....

"This one too. Look, and then this."

Every time Chiwa pushed the buttom, the image switched, and each one was of Hime rolling her eyes.

"What is this? You wanted to get pictures of supernatural things?"

"This was practice for looking up with the eyes."

"Eh?"

"Hime-chan used a digital camera to take pictures of the entire drill of looking up with the eyes, one hundred times."

Now that you mention it, Chiwa was the one who previously advocated that Hime should undergo「basic training」.

I didn't think Hime would actually do it.....

"Last night, she sent a lot of texts to my phone. The subject was, 「Eyes Really Tired」. Once I saw her perseverance, who could oppose it?"

"I see."

Hime really intended to become more courageous.

Maybe this is what she meant by the first step that could 「split apart the gray-colored world」.

"Let's talk to Masuzu again at the club room."

I mumbled to myself.

If 「Jien-Otsu」 ended in this kind of way, it didn't matter if it was Hime or Chiwa or --- of course, me --- our hearts would not be happy.

Even if Masuzu intended to leave, I had to settle this uncomfortable mood.

"I won't go."

Chiwa shut up as she chewed the last piece of hamburger steak, and turned away.

"Tomorrow our class is having a party to celebrate the end of exams, and everyone's going to a barbecue buffet. I've been looking forward to it for a long time."

"Well, leave it to me then."

Right.

Even if it was for this totally un-cute 「childhood friend」, I had to try to get Masuzu to stay.

♦

The next day, Monday.

As expected, Masuzu did not come to school.

The class rep claimed she was cutting classes… so did she intend to drop out of school?

Based on yesterday's conversation at the pool, Masuzu was going to leave today or tomorrow, but she'd probably return to the clubroom once, since her first edition set of「JOJO」was still here. Although she had another set at home, she would definitely be back to get it. Even if she was the kind of woman whose actions and thoughts were impossible to guess, I could only have confidence in her love for JOJO.

As soon as the school bell rang, I ran to the club room, but Hime was already waiting inside. Like always, she got there early. Don't tell me she could actually leap across space?

Hime scurried to my side and said,

"Eita, I finished it.「The Ideal Maiden」"

"Oh! You're finally done?"

Hime hugged her notebook tightly to her chest and nodded. Even though she still wore a poker face, what was really pitiful was her nose「Gururru」-ing up, exposing how satisfied she was with herself. [66]

"Where is it? Let me look."

Seeing my hand extend towards her notebook, Hime quickly retreated backwards with her face flushed.

"N-n-no, let's wait until the club president is here."

This time she was clearly embarrassed. When we just met, I thought this girl was an alien, but recently she has been full of rather rich expressions.

Then ---

"Wha---? Don't say that, let me see~"

Thinking it was Masuzu's voice, I turned my head back to find --- next to the door that I forgot to close, there was a young maiden of blond hair and blue eyes, and next to her

a bald man in a black suit wearing sunglasses.

Natsukawa Mana.

In the end, she even turned up at our club room!

"Hey, let me see that notebook! I'm very interested in Suzu's club activities, and I want to investigate what kind of things you do to report back to dad.

Mana entered the club room, and snatched the notebook right from the hands of frightened Hime.

"Stop! Give it back to her!"

When I was about to grab Mana, the man in the black suit stepped in, and I was instantly swept and pinned to the ground.

"St-stop ....."

Barely able to breath, I was nearly overwhelmed by the weight the of man in the black suite riding my back, when I shouted,

"Hime spent all of her effort writing that notebook! Give it back to her!"

"Oh wow, really? I want to read it even more now ♪"

Mana sneered while she sat on the table and began to flip through the notebook.

Hime gave a very frightened and pitiful look, and shuddered and sneezed as she clung to the window curtains. Right, she was an extremely shy person. Because she was always in a tangle with Chiwa and Masuzu, I nearly forgot she practically has never spoken to her other classmates---

`--- ♪ a real maiden (REAL PRINCESS) will never give in.`

Ah ---

She's reading it aloud!

Against all expectations, she's reading it aloud.

Like her older sister, she was such as excessive character!

But when Masuzu did it, it didn't matter so much.

Because the person she did it to was me, it wasn't important.

After all, I once had "past • eighth grade syndrome."

When she exposed it all, it was such a big humiliating blow that I wanted to die. But that was the past, and it wasn't now.

However, Hime was「active」.

Reality was so frightening to her that she made up a fictional world of delusions and hid inside of it.

If this delusion were to be exposed, ridiculed, and destroyed, she would have nowhere to go ---

"Kuwahahahahahahahhahahahahaha!"

Mana's obnoxious laughter rang across the club room.

"RE, REAL PRINCESS! It's written like maiden, but you reading it like PRINCESS! Please! Is this about her royal highness coming? There's nothing wrong about it? From the beginning it was such a hilarious thing ---?"

Hime's hands clenched the curtains.

Tears trickled down her face, and the cream-colored curtains became gradually wet as if sprinkled by rain.

"Stop it!"

I tried to use my arm to push myself up, but this bald guy was too heavy! What did he eat to become so muscular he'd never fall!

Then Mana turned to the next page:

♪ A real maiden (REAL PRINCESS) won't be hurt.

♪ Even during difficult times, she'll keep smiling forward.

♪ Even if alone, she won't cry.

"So cold ~ ahh."

Mana gave a nasal laugh, and looked back towards Hime.

"Didn't you write, 「Even if alone, she won't cry ♪」, right? But you're a total mess right now? That's not like a REAL PRIN-CESS. This is what you do for club activities? I don't get it --- are my brains no good? Or is your brain completely broken?"

Hime didn't say a single word in reply. She just cried, clutching the curtains.

♪ A real maiden (REAL PRINCESS) won't be afraid.

♪ Even when meeting new people, she'll smile and say hello.

♪ No matter who it is, she can instantly become friends.

"I'm starting to feel..... as opposed to an ideal, this is actually closer to a delusion, right?"

Mana smiled wryly.

"Suzu's been participating in these kinds of club activities. No wonder Dad is that angry. He hates these kinds of people the most. People who have neither brains nor power. Only delusions. And I have the same opinion. Really, it's so annoying."

♪ A real maiden (REAL PRINCESS) won't be discouraged.

♪ She's always filled with love.

♪ No matter what happens, she'll never give up.

♪ She'll be able to walk to his Royal Highness's carriage, and meet

"Wuaahhahahaha! Look at that! There's even a Prince here!"

There was nothing funny about it, but Mana continued to slap the table in laughter.

"Really, just because there's a princess, a royal prince will come? Does he ride a white horse? Puhaha, is this really a high school? It's more like a nursery school."

Maybe because her tears were completely dried up, Hime only stood expressionlessly.

Mana muttered a phrase, "How boring ---"

"It'd be better if your club renamed itself to be「Delusional Maidens Club」. Abbreviated: Delusional-Club. Awesome ♪" [67]

Hehehehahahahehaha.

Mana's laughter echoed against the windows and walls.

Then, Mana had a mocking face as she took ---

What Chiwa suggested…….

What Masuzu gave out…….

What Hime desperately tried to write with all her effort……

The assignment notebook.....

And with a sharp sound --- tore it apart.

.....Stop joking.

"Stop..... joking!!! You bastard!!!"

I focused all of my strength to my feet, and strained so much to stand up, I think I nearly broke some blood vessels.

I overcame the body weight of the man in the black suit, and stood up!

Was this a scene of fiery spirit driving one to insane strength?

Or the man in black's carelessness?

Whichever it was, it didn't matter.

As long as I can stop this bastard woman's giggling laugh, I don't care!!

"Someone else's delusions aren't things you can laugh at!"

I ferociously cried out, scaring Mana expressionless.

"Every person has some kind of humiliating delusion! I have one! My brain has a pile of delusions that will make people roll around everywhere! Among delusions, mine are incomparable! I am the reincarnation of a dragon, and receive the welcoming favors of Beauty • Dance • Angels. I also fight with invisible enemies, know everything about Western music, play guitar, and can ride a monster motorcycle--- I'm just that kind of humiliating guy! Of course I reality, none of those things will ever come true! I don't remember a thing about past lives. And angels? Even the girls in my class think I'm 「disgusting」! About guitars, I can't even play a recorder. And when I say motorcycle, I can only ride a bike! Not a single one will turn into reality! I'm already sick of myself! I might as well just die!"

Mana, struck dumb, shrugged and gave a call.

"Yasuoka, shut this guy up."

Bang! There was a loud noise.

Sparks scattered around my eyes, and I found my cheek glued to the ice-cold wall.

--- Ah, I was punched?

By the time my head cleared, my nose was already dripping blood.

"Eehh!"

I heard Hime's quiet shriek from the side.

I fell to the floor where my dripping blood stained the ground.

.....Damn!

How can I lose!?

I clenched my teeth and stood up.

"Even so, I can't help but to continue with my delusions. Because I am alive, people have hope, and it's a more positive way of living, isn't that so? Compared to yesterday, today is better; compared to today, we try to make tomorrow even better, right? That's why we have delusions. Because of that, I'm cool --- I'm awesome! If I imagine a thousand delusions, maybe one day at least one will come true. Those hopes are the only thing I absolutely won't give up! If we stop dreaming delusions, we can

only wait to be crushed under reality!"

My ears rang with a cracking sound, and my head spun wildly for spell.

Strange? I've been punched again?

To stop myself from collapsing, I tried to grab the steel bookshelf, but I only scattered a JOJO books from the shelf. I tried to twist my body to avoid them, but I still stepped on a few books.

Hirohiko Araki-sensei, I'm sorry! [68]

This would definitely make Masuzu angry!

Compared to being punched, Masuzu's angry hits were definitely much scarier.

"Are you an idiot?"

Mana sniggered.

"How can delusions possibly come true? The fact that you've been beaten to pulp, is that good enough evidence for you?"

This girl said things that could make the dead angry.

She was really powerful, like a genius evil queen.

But --- thanks to her, I was filled with strength.

"It will come true."

I wiped my nosebleed, and stood up again.

"No, I will make it come true just for you to see."

The man in black punched in the cheek.

My vision wavered.

My body burned hot like I had a fever, and the depths of my brain felt numb.

--- I won't budge!

If I fall, Hime's poem will only be treated as a 「delusion」, and it'll all be over.

But no.

Her Prince will come.

He'll definitely come!

".....W-w-w-wait, what's going on?"

Mana's easy-going expression finally turned rigid.

"Why are you pushing yourself to this extent? You've been beaten to pulp by Yasuoka. If you heard about his experience, it'd make you want to pee in your pants, so you better lie down. I don't deliberately mean to---"

"Apologize!"

I growled, as I brought my bloodstained face closer to Mana.

"Apologize to Hime! Apologize for tearing the notebook. Apologize for mocking her poem!"

"What?"

Mana repeated, as she took a step backwards.

I stepped forward.

Mana drew backwards.

"W-w-w-what are you? .....What kind of person are you?"

"I am ---"

I drew in a big breath.

I faced Mana, as well as Hime who hid in the curtains, and said,

"I am Natsukawa Masuzu's boyfriend, Harusaki Chiwa's childhood friend, and Akishino Himeka's ex-boyfriend ---「Holy Dragon Knight of Dawn」 Kidou Eita! Remember that, you bastard!"

When I finished, Mana was backed up completely against the wall next to the window ---

"--- That's enough, Mana."

I looked back, and Masuzu was standing in the doorway.

She looked grieved, as she looked around at the devastation in the club room.

"Eita-kun and Akishino-chan haven't done anything wrong. As long as I go back, that's all?"

"Y-you understand, right?"

Mana distinctly gave a sigh of relief.

"Right? If Suzu was this obedient from the very beginning, I wouldn't do this sort of thing, right? I didn't mean to do it on purpose. Oh --- silly me, I was careless."

"Hey, Masuzu."

With my nose still bleeding, I approached my「Girlfriend」.

Masuzu had an expression that seemed like she was about to cry, and she took out a handkerchief.

"Eita-kun, your injury looks serious."

I pushed away Masuzu's hand, which had approached to wipe away the blood on my nose.

"Hey, listen to me."

"Eita-kun, let me deal with this....."

Masuzu's hand extended once again.

"Listen to me, Masuzu."

I shoved away her hand.

"Please, let me treat your injury....."

Masuzu's voice was mixed with tears.

"Why did you have to try doing this sort of thing? Am I even worth it, that you'd do this to yourself? I don't deserve it. I am a fake, so ---"

"Listen to me, Masuzu!"

My shout caused Masuzu's shoulders to shake.

"Please listen to me! If you still want to leave after hearing me, I won't say anything more. So please, listen to my last request as your boyfriend."

"......What are you saying?"

I looked back at the curtains, at the silhouette of Hime who was still hiding.

"The person who has something to say isn't me. It's Hime."

Hime poked her head out slightly.

With big wide eyes, Hime stared straight at me.

"That was a very cute poem."

"....."

"But, as a poem, it won't express the meaning you want to convey. A poem by we, who have「Eighth-Grade Syndrome」, are always self-centered, and self-minded..... it can't convey the sincere feelings that you have. So to really express it, it's probably better to just say it aloud."

Hime stared straight at me.

"Wait a minute, what are you starting to do all of sudden?"

Mana impatiently pecked in.

"This isn't Onii-san's stage time, just rewind past it."

"This is our club problem, so you back down, you stupid blonde!"

Mana's face twisted with humiliation.

"Hey, Yasuoka, get rid of this guy."

The man dressed in black clenched his fist, made a few smacking sounds, and leaned over.

Not good.....

The effects from just being hit around the first time, it was inconceivable how I was still standing right now. Compared to the time in front of the train station, my injuries from this time were much worse than the time I fought with four people. This guy was really a worthy bodyguard, and he had really professional skill.

When I thought it was all over for me, a little figure appeared in front of me.

Hime.

She stretched her arms open wide.

"Don't....."

Hime's voice was accompanied with tears, as she shook her head left and right.

"Don't! Don't! Don't! Don't! Don't! Don't! Don't hit Hime's Eita! Stop messing with our club! This is Hime and Eita's place! It was really, really hard to this place! This was the place---

President and Chihuahua were going to have club activities together! S-so go away!!!!!"

Masuzu's body was clearly shaking.

She's not afraid.

Rather, Hime's「Club Application」was full of inner shaking.

"Well said, Himechi!"

The door opened with a loud noise.

Everyone turned back simultaneously, to see Chiwa with a shinai in the center position.

"What Himechi just said is absolutely right! This is our place. All you non-members get out, otherwise---!"

Whish! The sharp edge sliced through the air.

This look made one remember the time when Chiwa was known as「Sword Ace Chihuahua」. She used her brimming spirit to pierce through Mana with her glaring eyes.

The man in black's face turned pale. Maybe he sensed Chiwa's extraordinary ability. He left me, in order to stand in front of Mana to protect her.

Good.

There was one final person.

"Masuzu."

I called out the name of my stupefied「Girlfriend」who stood there blankly like an idiot.

"I'll ask you yesterday's question again --- what are you going to do? Do you want to stay here? Or not?"

Masuzu stared at my face, and then at Chiwa and Hime.

Her expression was gradually restored with vigor.

Gradually filled up with strength.

She came back with a fearless smile!

"Eita-kun."

"Eh."

"Who are you talking to, with that extraordinary look?"

Masuzu casually combed her silver hair upward, and smiled.

She looked back to see Mana stunned.

"I want to stay here."

"Eh? W-what is this?! You just said you were going to go back!"

"Yes, I thought about saying it like that to you once, to feed your insignificant self-ego."

"In-insignificant? Don't joke, Suzu! You're going to ignore your family's orders? You're not afraid of dad?"

"I do not understand the convict's statement."

"Who's the convict?"

"I hope they're light on the prison sentence. You go make the confession."

"What are you talking about?"

"Then go self-destruct."

"It's even worse?"

If she could come out with such a malicious tongue, then there was no problem.

Natsukawa Masuzu was completely revived!

"Miss, it's about time to....."

The man dressed in black whispered in Mana's ear.

When I noticed, the door had been drawing huge crowds, all people from the cultural clubs. After all the commotion with the door wide open, it was impossible for them not to gather.

"Get out."

Masuzu pointed at the door, and said firmly.

"In this room, only maidens with excellent qualifications are permitted to enter. Of the male sex, only Kidou Eita is allowed --- okay, so those without qualifications, get out now!"

Masuzu's cold attitude caused everyone in the cultural clubs to go "woaah," and then burst into cheers and applause. Only Yamamoto-kun from the football club; and I don't know how he managed to sneak in, clenched his fists and shook them..... what happened to your practice?

Mana very unwillingly clenched her fists.

"Suzu, you will regret this."

"More importantly, apologize to Akishino-san right now. Say, 「I'm sorry」. Come on!"

"N-no!"

"Mana."

Masuzu suddenly narrowed her eyes.

"You're going to disobey the words of your older sister?"

"......!"

Suddenly shivering, Mana bit her lower lip.

"......Sorry."

"I can't hear you."

"I'm sorry! It was my fault!"

No matter how you look at it, she forced herself to apologize…. Well, we can't expect anything more. Hime noddedly slightly. It seems like she didn't want to drag this issue out any longer.

Then, Masuzu directly glared at Mana and said,

"Tell that person, I will never go back. Tell him I'll be waiting in that room, waiting for mom whom he threw away."

Mana whimpered like a child, and exposed a few tears,

"Fool! You really, really, really are a fool! At this point, it's impossible for that person to come back! Just like last time, you're going to cry from being deeply hurt!"

The man in black pulled strongly on Mana's resisting arm, and took her away.

The two of them pushed away the crowd and left, and the crowd itself slowly dispersed. The door was shut --- and once again the club was left in peace.

Me, Masuzu, Chiwa, and Hime.

This was the space for the Society of Young Maidens Club.

"It's finally back to normal ---"

I was about to laugh when I suddenly felt my consciousness slipping away from me.

Ah, no good.

As soon as I relaxed, it seems like the damage from being injured….

"Eita-kun!"

"Ei-kun!"

"Eita!"

I listened to their three voices overlapping ---

I fell to the ground facing the scattered JOJO books on the floor.

#10: A New Step is Mayhem

#10 新たなる一歩は修羅場

"Impressive, Eita, yet again you've really shown yourself off."

Kaoru said, summarizing yesterday's commotion.

I was eating my bento, while Kaoru ate sweet bread.

Today it was just like the usual lunch break —yesterday, I ended up going to the hospital and afterwards I went to bed right away so I couldn't make a bento. Thus for the first time in a very long while, I had a bento from the convenience store. The taste was just passable, but as expected, the money is best spent in other ways.

"Somehow, I feel like I've been getting hurt a lot recently."

Kaoru stared at the big band-aid in my face and smiled.

To be honest, my injury wasn't as serious as it looked. Although it hurt a ton when I was being punched, my condition was much better than it had been last month when I fought in front of the train station. Maybe the man wearing black knew the proper technique to not overdo it when punching people, as expected of a professional.

The news later leaked to the disciplinary committee. Even though we were cross-examined, 'tell us exactly what happened', Masuzu lied just enough to skip over the entire incident. We even didn't get any reprimands or questions from the staff room. It seems like Mana —or more accurately: Masuzu's father, stretched his hand and arranged something behind the scenes with the school.

What kind of father is he?

But if he could give up the idea of calling Masuzu back, whatever it was, that was just fine.

"Oh, Eita, there was something I wanted to ask you."

"Huh?"

"The time when you asked me that English question before exams, 'let's restore our bonds from the past', have you solved it?"

Unconsciously, I was startled with surprise.

"Ah, right, um, sure. I went to ask the English teacher, Kishiwada-sensei for help, and

he taught me."

"Really? That's good."

Even though I nearly said it carelessly, Kaoru seemed to not notice.

"I thought it sounded like something out of a love letter. Did the question come out of a romantic novel?"

"Ah, right, I actually think that was the case."

"If the love letter came from your childhood friend or your ex-girlfriend, that'd be mayhem. If you were single it would have been fine, however, for a while there, you have got a girlfriend."

"[...] ...Yeah."

He hasn't realized it... right?

Kaoru...?

I wiped my sweat with a handkerchief as I said:

"B-But when the time comes, it's enough with I just rejecting them clearly, right? I just have to make it clear that 'I have a girlfriend now'."

"Hmm? Will it really work as easy as that?"

"Why not?"

Kaoru licked his finger to clean off bread jam.

"A childhood friend, or an ex girlfriend, they wouldn't simply just give up."

"[...]"

"Even if you have a girlfriend, if they truly possess sincere feelings, they won't give up. Rather, they would try their hardest to restore their bonds, right? Girls are stubborn —It's much more than Eita expected, right?"

I wiped and wiped, but my sweat dripped incessantly.

"D-D-Don’t say such scary things."

"Scary? That English question? It’s very unlike the number one student of our class to say something like that before exams."

Kaoru laughed and used his straw to drink strawberry milk.

Recently I feel Kaoru’s been really hard to deal with...

If even my best friend is teasing me, then I don’t have any moment of peace at all!

♦

That day after school——

I went with Masuzu for shopping in town.

Because we had to re-purchase the volumes of 'JoJo’s Bizarre Adventures' that were messed up because of yesterday’s incident... Of course the guilty party, *me*, was 'willing enough' to pay for everything.

Whatever, there wasn’t anything I could do about it—

"Hey, Masuzu, it seems like there aren’t any in tankoubon[69] format. Why don’t we try getting the bunkoban version instead?"

"[...]"

Masuzu-san, for a while now you have not said a thing.

Why is that?

Even when we were in class, other than the things that were unavoidable and absolutely necessary, she didn’t say a thing.

She can't possibly be that *angry about the JoJo issue, right...?*

We wandered through three bookstores nearby, but we weren't able to buy the volumes that we wanted. JoJo was a series that had been popular for more than two decades, so it was very difficult to find the first few volumes in local bookstores.

Later we took a longer trip to the big, more specialized bookstores and thus finally managed to buy them all.

Around eight o'clock in the evening, we were sitting on the deserted bus car on the way back——

"Certainly, right now you have been extremely noisy."

In the double seat, next to me, Masuzu finally spoke.

Her tone was barbed, as expected it did look like she was really angry.

"What do you mean by noisy?"

"If one enrages the Natsukawa family, one can *never* tell what it will lead to. You, and Harusaki-san too, like to meddle with things too much."

Ehhh, somehow, she's actually bothered by that thing with Mana?

If that was the issue, then I had decided my response a long time ago.

"About the circumstances in your household, I really don't care."

"What was that?"

"I don't know what secrets you keep to yourself, but I hate splitting up with you just like that, that's all."

Exactly.

Of course we have secrets. We are 'fakes' after all.

So the most important thing— is how do we want to face ourselves about that.

And how we want to see each other.

Masuzu remained silent for a while and suddenly said with a sigh:

"From now on, when we're alone, I'm not going to use honorifics."

"Huh?"

"When we're in front of others, we can be fake lovers. Other than this, I'll still treat you coldly, do you understand, *Eita*?"

Woah, does that mean we're finally on an equal first name basis and sharp tongue now?

You can treat me more and more unreasonably too[70] !

"Aah, do as you please."

"...Why aren't you angry? Why aren't you saying 'Why did you leave out the honorifics'?"

"It matters not —In fact, this type of arrogance, forced and headstrong ways of doing things fits you perfectly, *Masuzu*."

"Fool... Such impertinence, even though you are just a fake."

After talking, Masuzu leaned her head against my chest.

Like that time Chiwa did before, she rubbed her face against me several times.

Masuzu seemed very comfortable sprouting out some 'Hnnn...' as she rubbed back and forth, her silver hair swaying... Did that mean that my chest was popular?

"H-Huh? Shouldn't we be pretending we're lovers only in front of others?"

"Of course not, this is— this is a JoJo reference."

"Eh? Which part? What volume is this from?"

"[...]"

Strange? She didn't answer immediately?

About JoJo, this girl should know everything.

"Four times."

"Huh?"

"This month, you've already ignored four of my JoJo references that I came up with much difficulty."

"Did I? When was that? What kind of references?"

As I finished, Masuzu immediately emerged with a triumphant smile and said:

"Hmph, as expected you didn't notice. Since you're *my* boyfriend, you need to further increase your JoJo-power. Understand, *Eita*?"

"Tch! What's with that arrogance..."

"'That arrogance' would be yours, especially with that standoffish reply? After all, I hold your *Weak Point'! Understand your position now!"*

Masuzu snuggled her head against my chest.

What's with this girl?

It felt subtly different from what she normally did to tease and make fun of me——

"Understand? From now on, there will only be one person in your eyes."

"Okay, okay. After all, you're my 'girlfriend'."

"And I'll be the only one you'll be this gentle with."

"...Yeah."

"Don't be having fun with some other girl."

"—Err, Wait a minute!"

"What?"

"You really want to shackle me up to that extent?"

Masuzu said with sharp eyes:

"Originally boyfriends are like this, right? In the beginning, I was really naïve.

Initially it was Harusaki Chiwa, after that even Akishino Himeka appeared. Even though you are merely an 'Anti-Love' in ideology, you're way too popular with girls, *Eita*."

Tch, You are the one who has no right to preach about that to someone else.

"But I'm merely a 'boyfriend'?"

"Idiot, because you *are* an impostor, your job is to be more *real* than the *real* thing itself."

"[...]"

Hnng.

I had nothing to say in reply.

Somehow, I felt that such sentence had some kind of deeper meaning.

"If you don't even know that, you're really stupid, stupid, stupid..."

Before we arrived at the bus stop, Masuzu called me 'stupid' fifteen times.

As for the number of times she rubbed me with her face —I couldn't even count.

♦

The next morning.

I waited in front of my house at the usual time to meet up with Chiwa.

Ever since we agreed on it before exams, we've been going to school together every day... I felt like my mental state returned to what it was like in elementary school.

"Hey, Ei-kun, did you end up buying 'JyoJyo'?"

Chiwa asked as she walked besides me.

"Even though we went to a place rather far away, we bought all the ones I trashed during that commotion, you see?"

I lifted up the paper bag in my hands for her to look into. Inside, there were twelve volumes of JoJo that we bought yesterday.

"You went *alone* with Natsukawa?"

"That's right."

"Nothing happened, right?"

"...That's right."

"Why did you just 'pause'? *Ei-kun*?"

Chiwa's eyes became very sharp.

From merely the '…' she managed to detect something! That's just too perceptive!

I ignored the cold sweat on my back and said:

"Nothing, it was really as it sounds. We merely just went to buy JoJo, and that's all."

"Really? It was only the two of you and you didn't make any progress?"

"Nothing, nothing at all."

It shouldn't be called progress, it was more like it worsened. Masuzu even announced that 'from now on I'll be sharp-tonguing and first name you!'

...Well, that face-rubbing certainly had me a little concerned.

Chiwa gave a big sigh and said:

"Really, I should have just went with you guys yesterday—"

"But you were going out with your classmates, right?"

"Ah, because I didn't go to the celebration party after the exam, I had to make up for it... Wuah, I originally wanted to eat lots of meat, like cow diaphragm, beef ribs, beef tongue, cow stomach, cow intestines... Uuuuu. "

Right, Chiwa even missed her barbecue party to rush over here.

This girl really had extraordinary comradeship with others.

I thought this part of her was really cute... Even though I would absolutely never say it.

"Thank you, Chiwa."

"Huh? For what?"

"Nothing, I just felt the urge of saying it."

"...Weird Ei-kun."

Even though she said that, Chiwa's face seemed to beam with joy.

At this time.

"Point 'one to eleven', Eita sighted, engage, and capture."

From the side alley, a person's shadow wrapped around my right arm.

Beautiful hair like a doll swayed in front of me.

"Good morning, Eita."

Akishino Himeka.

She shyly looked up at my face.

"Hi, Hime. What does 'one to eleven' mean?"

I tsukkomied her trans-dimensional language and Hime pointed at the sign on the telephone pole.

Mura Town, District 1, #12. [71]

"That's an address!"

That could have been better than that! Well, they're all delusions anyways.

EKiMaE was better!

"Good morning —Himecchi!"

After giving her greeting, Chiwa grabbed Hime's arm and pulled her away from me. Recently, I felt like I was always seeing this kind of confrontations.

"Himecchi, are you going to the club room right after school?"

"Affirmative."

"Because we don't have snacks, I want to buy some at the cafeteria. What does Himecchi dig?"

"Those pop up candy 'Donpacchi'."

"...Are they still on sale?"

As I watched them talk as they walked, I felt warm inside.

Hime was completely accustomed to talking with Chiwa.

At this time, there were two girls that passed us while chatting.

Seeing them from the side, they seemed quite familiar. Probably girls from class 2.

"What's wrong, Hime?"

I don't know why, but Hime stopped moving, staring at the backs of the two girls.

She was silent like this for a while.

Then the gentle 'exhale' of her breath——

"G-G-Good morningyu!" "Ouch!"

Along with the loud noise, Hime bowed her head!

The momentum of her bow had hit Chiwa's back. The 'Ouch!' that we just heard was Chiwa's voice.

The two girls who looked back seemed as if they were looking at something they couldn't believe.

Hime's face flushed red and her knees shook… She looked as if she was awaiting the verdict in a trial as she stared at those two.

Shortly afterward—

"Akishino-san! Good morning!"

"G-Good morning! Akishino-san."

One of them smiled very energetically.

The other person, though a bit shy, slightly raised her hand and greeted Hime.

"[...]"

"[...]"

"Uh… Well, see you around then…?"

With nothing left to discuss, the two left as if fleeing.

Hime blushed and watched their backs, raised her nose, then faced me and said:

"Eita."

"Huh?"

"I can say hello now!"

"...Great."

What's that 'g-g-good morningyu', anyways?!

Also, don't add a headbutt on Chiwa, anyways!

There were many things that I could have tsukkomied.

But for Hime, this was a first 'step'.

In order to cleave this gray world apart.

'Holy Dragon Princess of Dawn' had just made a tiny crack.

♦

Then, after-school at the club.

Akishino Himeka formally joined the club and the 'Society for Bringing Out Your Maiden Self' finally had four members.

This new member... suddenly grabbed my arm.

"Why is Eita running away?"

"Of course it is because you're always sticking to me!"

"No, I need to use Spiritual Power (Psychometry) to make you recover your memories from your past life. In order to do this, we need to be touching each other for three hours every day, so hold me."

Even just after newly joining the club, she was already causing a worrisome start.

Masuzu and Chiwa, who sat on the opposite side, stared at Hime with a rigid smile.

"Welcome to our club, Akishino-san, but please leave Eita-kun alone."

"Let's get along, Himecchi, but you should leave Ei-kun alone."

"I refuse."

It was the same mechanical voice she has always had, except for I felt it was very assertive. Her hands that held my arm did not loosen at all.

To Hime, did this club become a 'New World'?

Even though she was taking advantage of the situation.

But becoming popular was part of this 'New World'...

"Even if you are an ex-girlfriend, you still need to act properly!"

Chiwa's veins bulged and her fist shook.

"Absolutely right. Even I, as the current girlfriend, will not act so shamelessly in front of others, in such a public place."

Masuzu's mouth twitched.

Hime heard her, but hugged even tighter.

"But this is a club activity."

"Club activity?"

I could not help but tilt my head, puzzled. Masuzu and Chiwa also wrinkled their eyebrows.

"The results of the Transdimensional Logic System's extensive calculations, has clearly determined that the most attractive girl to the opposite sex is Natsukawa Masuzu."

Sure, everyone knows that already. You don't need to ask the Transdimensional Logic System about it.

"Therefore, this is what I think —the fastest shortcut to becoming popular and the optimal answer to becoming an outstanding maiden is——"

Hime stared at Masuzu with a firm expression completely out of her old character and said:

"To steal Eita from Natsukawa Masuzu's side."

"Oh!"

The person who exclaimed in surprise was Chiwa.

Masuzu had her mouth opened wide, she forgot to close it as she stared at Hime.

"...Really now, I see..."

I thought very inconsequentially:

Meaning——

If you can steal the boyfriend from the hands of the school's most popular girl, Masuzu, you would reach a degree even more cute and popular than Masuzu. In other words 'The New • Most Popular Person in School'.

Compared to randomly attracting the attentions of random boys, this was a much more efficient method.

Hahahahaha.

Ahahahahahahahahahahahahahaha.

...Ahh.

But I'm the one they're arguing over!

Chiwa clapped her hands overjoyed and said:

"Amazing, Himecchi! That's a really good idea! Right, why didn't I think of such a simple thing! This way we can attack Ei-kun fair and square... No, it should be called a 'Club Activity'."

Acting right away, Chiwa hugged my empty arm!

Masuzu said in an extraordinarily rare panic:

"Wait a moment! This kind of thing can't be allowed, right?"

"Why? Isn't this a great club activity? Or are you saying it's not okay because it's your own boyfriend we're talking about. But you wouldn't say such a stingy thing, right? You're our president after all! You don't have confidence in your own popularity after

all?"

"The present girlfriend should not be able to monopolize Eita. The ex-girlfriend should also have some access to some doors."

"...Kuh..."

Masuzu could not even move one step.

She had been completely cornered.

To compensate for this, Masuzu stared at me with very scary eyes.

...Hey, why me?

It's-It's somehow my fault?!

"Hey, Ei-kun, why don't we go somewhere during summer vacation? Just the two of us, alone. And of course it's for club activities♪."

"Eita, in order the recover your memories of our past life, I want you to come live at my house. Please note that this is a club activity."

"Eita-kun, there's something we *really* need to talk *later*. This is... *not* a club activity. You better *prepare* yourself."

This dangerous atmosphere swirled into a whirlpool.

Three people in the room rallied back and forth with each other, gradually increasing the intensity and degree of sharpness.

This was the opening prelude to the New World.

This was the opening of a new 'Mayhem'.

"Hey, Himecchi, it's about time you let go of Ei-kun! Ei-kun's been sweating non-stop. He must be hot, right?"

"Chihuahua should be more dignified. Eita's pulse is rising alarmingly and it's definitely because of you."

"Well, let me take a note♪ 'Xth July, Eita-kun was hugged by Harusaki-san and kept smiling foolishly', 'Eita-kun was hugged by Akishino-san and kept smiling stupidly', 'Naturally, he is using his elbow to rub the chests of those two girls', 'Even though he kept saying that his eyes only see me, *only see me*, *only see me*, *only see me*, *only see me*, *only see me*, *only see me*'.

Sa—... ve... me...

Anyone, save me!

I'm stuck in the mayhem between my Girlfriend, Ex-Girlfriend and Childhood Friend!

Afterword

In a romantic comedy, the childhood friend and girlfriend always have a「hostile relationship」.

It's the same as how the hero's nemesis is the demon, the detective's enemy is the thief, and justice's opponent is evil. The childhood friend and girlfriend are bound by fate to always battle each other.

Why?

The childhood friend is dear to him, and he is pampered by the「more than friends, but not yet lovers」relationship. But due to the debut of the「girlfriend's」outside pressure, he has no choice but face his true feelings, and realize his love.

As for his girlfriend—she discovers that a memento has been stuck to her boyfriend. That is,「his bond towards the childhood friend」. This kind of bond forged through years of exhausting training was something the girlfriend could never obtain, no matter how anxious she was about it. Every time the bonds of the past re-emerges, the girlfriend is frightened out of her nerves.

Because of the girlfriend, the childhood friend becomes aware of her true feelings.

Because of the childhood friend, the girlfriend is often very disturbed in her heart.

And so they fight.

And it becomes mayhem.

This flurry of mayhem will unfold among both sides, and will certainly transform into something interesting and「wonderful」.

This is the reason why「girlfriend」and「childhood friend」is included in the title.

If you readers enjoy the commotion of girls competing with each other over the lead male (romantic comedy), I am honored.

I am absolutely grateful that Bunko decided to make a radio drama CD and manga.

The radio CD is scheduled to be made by HOBiRECORDS, and the manga will be drawn by SQUARE ENIX and serialized in in the monthly magazine, 「GANGAN JOKER」. Please give these works your attention along with the original text.

Well, the story for this time ends here.

Thank you readers for supporting me until this point.

Translator notes and references

1. ↑ Maniac (マニアック) is used for enthusiasts of some kind, in this context it means that it's for those with "certain fetishes".
2. ↑ Seifuku apron (制服エプロン) seems to actually be a type of fetish.
3. ↑ Parodied Google.
4. ↑ She is imitating the tone of shady dealers, like guys that promote strip shows.
5. ↑ Written in English. This is perhaps another JoJo reference as battle screams in capital English letters are common there.
6. ↑ Sekihan (赤飯) is red rice, used for joyous occasions, usually parodied by "becoming an adult".
7. ↑ Original: "Otou-sama" and "Oka-sama".
8. ↑ Original: "Oba-sama".
9. ↑ **Chuuni**: Short for "chuunibyou".
10. ↑ "季堂 鋭太" is the regular way, his example is "モテ堂 モテ太".
11. ↑ **Nagoya Dialect**: The original was 15 katakana "A NO TE GA MI WO KA I TA NO HA O MA E KA", but he pronounced it like "a, ano tegamy wo kyata no ha, omya kya".
12. ↑ Eita forms "Te ga myushical" from tegamy, the "Te" he used was from hand (手).
13. ↑ A type of power that lets you "materialize" a spirit who "stands behind you", one person can only have one and a Stand can't change owners, thus Masuzu makes a point with that example.
14. ↑ Volume 13 is where Jojo part 3 starts, which is also the most popular part of the series, her grievance comes from missing out the part that she likes the most.
15. ↑ Samurai suicide.
16. ↑ Shelf of the mind (心の棚) is a book.
17. ↑ **Baldness**: She says "Senbetsu" (せんべつ) in Japanese "farewell gift", it was supposed to be "senetsu" (僭越), which means "presumptuous/bold".
18. ↑ Barking sound effect.
19. ↑ Rampaging Brute (暴走獣) is pronounced "beast", the kanji could roughly be read as "violent beast", the chorus is a pun. "Ore, ore, ore, oh, rei", "rei" being "zero" in kanji.
20. ↑ Gangs usually use banners with a combination of cool looking kanji that sometimes doesn't make sense, some other times the kanji is so hard they can't even read it.

21. ↑ "Summer River" are actually the two kanji of the name "Natsukawa" read individually.
22. ↑ JoJo reference
23. ↑ She wrongly pronounces "Stand"
24. ↑ A line from JoJo, which is actually linked to a meme said by Straights/Straizo.
25. ↑ **Light Bulb**: Light bulb is slang for an unwanted third guest.
26. ↑ They call him "popularDou" (モテ堂) instead of "Kidou".
27. ↑ Initially she said "chinke"/"uncool" , now she is changing it to "menchi"/"hamburger steak".
28. ↑ This time it's pride (プライド) VS fried (フライド).
29. ↑ Red bean soup is normally a warm soup.
30. ↑ The title of the group is 美•舞•天使たち. 美 reads as "Bi" and is from beauty , 舞 reads as "Mai" and means dance , 天使たち reads as tenshi-tachi meaning "Angels".
31. ↑ In this sentence Kaoru switched from his usual "boku" (I, male pronoun) to "watashi" (I, female pronoun).
32. ↑ She uses a childlike tone here.
33. ↑ Written in English.
34. ↑ Written in English. The reading "houkago" is the same, but the kanjis are different. 放課後 is "after school" and 放火後 is "after fire".
35. ↑ It's written in hiragana, which gives more of a "Ai lub U ♥" childish feeling.
36. ↑ Sei is written with 静 or the kanji for "quiet".
37. ↑ Written in katakana, "hime" means "princess", fitting her "burning prin princess" or a short version of her name "Himeka".
38. ↑ Hime was reading the kanji 駅前 as EKME, Eita tells her the proper reading "in her own tone"
39. ↑ A "net" version of Kawasiku or "continue".
40. ↑ This one is "wakataka" or "I get it".
41. ↑ Denpa or "radio wave" (電波) is used on the term "denpa kei", "electric wave lover"; these type of people are ones who act weird towards stuff with no apparent sane reasoning. Since it's a ridiculous term, it was adopted as a pun in regular life and is referenced here.
42. ↑ "Chiwa matte" instead of "chotto matte" here.
43. ↑ Basically the bit with the black notebook and the memo of bad deeds, is a reference to the fight between Jotaro Kujo (Star Platinium) & Steely Dan (Lovers), Dan took an hostage and forced Jotaro to go through a bunch of humiliating requests, at one point we learn that Jotaro was writing down everything, which is from where this scene gets its inspiration, even the dialog is the same; especially in the part where the jig is up and the bad guy begs for

forgiveness. In fact, in the manga Eita is drawn like Steely Dan for a few panels. In JoJo, this happens at the start of volume 18.

44. ↑ Hime normally speaks "mature like" and adds some weird meanings to her lines, here she does the contrary.
45. ↑ Kanji for "traditional Japanese inn" used.
46. ↑ **Gyun-gyun**: Sound of hugging.
47. ↑ This is supposed to be a reference to the visual novel, School days. Apparently main character was stabbed to death in the end by jealous girls in a love triangle.
48. ↑ I think this is a reference on how Yamato no Orochi was killed
49. ↑ adding a "cchi" at the end of a line or a name is something that is done in a playful tone by certain characters. Also "ecchi" means "pervert" and might reflect Chiwa's anger towards Hime after hugging Eita for "no reason".
50. ↑ Her name is a mixture of the leads from Neon Genesis Evangelion, Ayanami Rei and Asuka Langley Soryu.
51. ↑ While I think the original words by some famous personality, the manga world had adapted the "temee no chi wa nani iro da" line as a catch phrase, the earliest was from Rei of Hokuto no Ken. Basically all humans have blood red and thus those who do monstruos acts towards others have their humanities questioned by who ask them such line.
52. ↑ The name is a mixture of the two voice actors of Rei and Asuka: Megumi Hayashibara, and Yūko Miyamura
53. ↑ He is referencing the meme "らめぇッ溶けちゃう！".
54. ↑ Tsukino is a mixture of two characters from Sailor Moon: Usagi Tsukino and Rei Hino. The voice actor's name is a mixture of their two voice actors: Kotono Mitsuishi and Michie Tomizawa. Between Yotsuishi & Mitsuishi, the kanji reading is similar.
55. ↑ A reference from Card Captor Sakura, a mixture of names: Tomoyo Daidouji and Sakura Kinomoto (The first name has a letter replaced). Her voice actor is again the combination of voice actors: Sakura Tange and Junko Iwao.
56. ↑ A reference from the dating sim "True Love Story". A mixture of names "Onodera Madoka" and "Kusanagi Shinobu". The voice actor is a homonym with a voice actor's name who sounds the same.
57. ↑ A reference from the dating sim, Tokimeki Memorial, and is a mixture of the names "Mio Kisaragi" and "Megumi Mikihara".
58. ↑ The teacher is teasing him by mixing up his name "Kidou" (季堂) with the word "Popular" (モテ), using "モテ堂".
59. ↑ She miss-heard Eita's "Oteyawaraka" with "Omoikkiri".
60. ↑ Sound of sniffing.
61. ↑ She reads "遅刻" strangely, it can mean "being late".

62. ↥ TISN is supposed to be an abbreviation for retreat/scatter/dispel.
63. ↥ Pun on death-by-choking or being taken away by the disciplinary committee.
64. ↥ 丸德 in Chinese; kanji-romanji dictionary doesn't give any hits for me. D:
65. ↥ Cow is supposed to be a pun for "really?" or something like that… it's kind of difficult to explain, and who knows what it says in Japanese. ^^"
66. ↥ I actually have no idea what the nose thing refers to. Some kind of sound effect maybe?
67. ↥ Has the same kanji structure as Jien-Otsu. Maybe it's a pun?
68. ↥ Mangaka of JOJO series
69. ↥ Volume form.
70. ↥ Normally Masuzu acted somewhat "cozy" with Eita in public, but kept being "regularly formal" with Eita in private. Changing to first name basis means that she is going to lower the respect towards him in private. Eita takes this as Masuzu being more aggressive in demeanor towards him, but readers actually take it as that she is going to be "cozier than in public" with him from now on.
71. ↥ If one reads the kanji (野積町一丁目十一番) and plays with the number part, it reads "1 (一) to (丁目) 11 (十一)".

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